



THE 7TH FONTANA BOOK OF GREAT GHOST STORIES

Darkly sinister tales by
A. E. Coppard, Washington Irving, Vladimir Nabokov
and others, selected by Robert Aickman



**THE SEVENTH FONTANA BOOK OF
GREAT GHOST STORIES**

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The Seventh Fontana Book of Great

Ghost Stories

Selected by Robert Aickman



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INTRODUCTION

In this, my seventh, collection, I have still contrived to include no author who has appeared in any of the preceding six; to offer no story which does not to one man (this man) seem of significant literary merit; and to purvey only variations on the theme of the truly supernatural, rejecting both the merely scientific, flying saucers and mutating monsters, and the merely shocking, rods and rapes.

In the world around us, needless to say, scientific advance and naked horror are rapidly becoming hard to differentiate. Within these pages is an alternative, a recurrent suggestion that in the universe are forces that may never be understood and mastered (and thus degraded). I believe the great increase in the popularity of ghost stories relates to the increasing demand for 'a world elsewhere'; because, the way things are going, only if there is such a world can we be in any sense free.

Much winter reading lies behind the process of selection, and much summer winnowing. While the number of good ghost stories is very small indeed, the volume of bad ones, as of bad plays, has to be encountered professionally in order to be credited. Moreover, it is an interesting aspect of the subject that an author often achieves two or three good ghost stories in a lifetime, and is then compelled by business need to submerge them in merely routine collections. I doubt whether this often happens unawares: the really good ghost story is so luminous a product, and so mysterious in its origins, that its author must usually know that this time the depths have spoken. Here, as in other respects, the true ghost story is akin to poetry. I believe that there are certain authors whose names will live into the indefinite future solely by virtue of one single ghost story; so limited is the supply and so potent the spell.

There are certain rules for assembling a collection of ghost stories; an anthologising which has become almost a minor art form on its own. If these rules are disregarded, the collection tends either to drag or to float: to depress rather than enchant, or, alternatively, to vaporise into whimsy. Perhaps rather than rules they are intuitions. Certainly, they are difficult to formulate with precision. But then nothing capable of being formulated with precision can have much life in it.

For example, the best collections will be found to be based upon a blazing and obvious masterpiece; a story one has had in the forefront of one's mind for the purpose, at least for a year or two. I shall not be expected to indicate which this is of the stories in the present collection. Then, I think, one proceeds to settle upon one's anchor stories: normally, a work by an established master of literature, a 'classic'; and, next, one of those solidly built ghost stories of the nineteenth century, which are among the best ever written, and likely to remain so. Here our classic is Washington Irving's 'Governor Manco and the Soldier', with its almost Beckford-like vision in the cave and its splendidly teasing conclusion. It is taken from Irving's beautiful book about the Alhambra: to be seen in every other Granada shop window, but though often bought by passers-through, less often read. Irving's sympathies were closely with the Moors, whose last capital Granada had been, and especially with their much abused and thereby much wronged last ruler, Boabdil; but his studies of the Spaniards around him have seldom been bettered for sympathetic but unsentimental veracity. Moreover, Irving was one of those few writers of simple English prose whom one might dare to commend as exemplar.

Mrs Riddell, who wrote our nineteenth-century story, was one of those numerous Victorian ladies who 'lived by their pen' in no uncertain, and assuredly no effortless, way. For them, life was often a hard struggle. Mrs

Riddell wrote no fewer than thirty novels, some of them under a male pseudonym; but at the end was compelled to fall back upon literary charity. Old Mrs Jones, her present phantom, becomes an exceptionally convincing apparition through solid literary craftsmanship and professionalism.

Ralph Adams Cram was one of America's leading architects; builder of cathedrals and sponsor of the Gothic revival. Though he wrote much art criticism, he is believed to have written only a handful of stories. 'The Dead Valley' deals with two kinds of experience that, one or both, happen to many people, without being always clearly recognised, still less acknowledged. The first is the mysterious change that sometimes overcomes one's awareness of an environment with which one thought oneself familiar. The second is the occasional apparently physical occurrence which one knows to have happened, because one was there and saw or heard it, indeed reflected about it; but, at the same time, knows could not possibly have happened—and so never mentions. Cram describes the border landscape between the outer vision and the inner, and does it with first-hand knowledge.

W. C. Morrow, a Californian, is likewise famed for a small collection of very curious tales. I am in no doubt that 'Over an Absinthe Bottle' is the best of them. Many readers will, I think, remember it for a long time.

Gerald Bullett was a sensitive, careful, judicious writer, who excelled in criticism; a writer of the Georgian School, one might say, or neo-Georgian, in the sense associated with Sir Edward Marsh and his next of singing birds. The central idea in 'Dearth's Farm' has affinities with H. G. Wells's 'Island of Doctor Moreau' and even with Saki's frequent observation that people grow so to resemble their pets as to be hard to distinguish from them; but its particular power lies in the crushing and terrifying contrast between unbridled strength (the epithet being exact) and gentle weakness. We feel it to describe some-

thing that might happen without notice to any of us, unless we are very lucky.

A. E. Coppard is everywhere accepted as a great master of the short story; and what a terrifying tale is his, because, again, so plausible and likely! If ever one ventures across the English Channel, this is the very feeling that at intervals comes upon one, disclaim as one will! These six of my contributors have gone before, as have so many writers of great ghost stories; and I do not feel it my task to comment in the same way upon my respected contemporaries. Mr Nabokov is an author of world fame, and knows only too well that of which he here writes. (But, once more, how persuasive in detail is that small provincial museum!) An exile not merely from Old Russia but thereby almost from this mundane globe, Mr Nabokov's genius unites the searchlight with the microscope. 'Esmeralda' is a story very much for men, many men. 'Where the Woodbine Twineth' shows the power that can dwell in four words, not even unfamiliar words, one would say, but here lighted upon by inspiration. 'Levitation' is based upon an idea of such simple, horrifying brilliance (but strange and beautiful also) that it will be reprinted many times. I am proud to be among the first of the many.

I have included a story of my own, first because it is almost an editorial tradition, but second because so many have asked me to resume doing so. I much appreciate their concern, and the support which this series has received.

ROBERT AICKMAN

LEVITATION

Joseph Payne Brennan

Morgan's Wonder Carnival moved into Riverville for an overnight stand, setting up its tents in the big ball park on the edge of the village. It was a warm evening in early October and by seven o'clock a sizable crowd had made its way to the scene of raucous amusement.

The travelling show was neither large nor particularly impressive of its type, but its appearance was eagerly welcomed in Riverville, an isolated mountain community many miles from the motion picture houses, vaudeville theatres and sports arenas situated in larger towns.

The natives of Riverville did not demand sophisticated entertainment; consequently the inevitable Fat Lady, the Tattooed Man and the Monkey Boy kept them chattering animatedly for many minutes at a time. They crammed peanuts and buttered popcorn into their mouths, drank cup after cup of pink lemonade, and got their fingers all but stuck together trying to scrape the paper wrappers off coloured taffy candies.

Everyone appeared to be in a relaxed and tolerant state of mind when the barker for the Hypnotist began his spiel. The barker, a short stocky man wearing a checkered suit, bellowed through an improvised megaphone, while the Hypnotist himself remained aloof at the rear of the plank platform erected in front of his tent. He appeared disinterested, scornful, and he scarcely deigned to glance at the gathering crowd.

At length, however, when some fifty souls had assembled in front of the platform, he stepped forward into the light. A murmur went up from the crowd.

In the harsh overhead electric glare, the Hypnotist made a striking appearance. His tall figure, thin to the point of

emaciation, his pale complexion, and most of all his dark, sunken eyes, enormous and brilliant, compelled immediate attention. His dress, a severe black suit and an archaic black string tie, added a final Mephistophelean touch.

He surveyed the crowd coolly, with an expression betraying resignation and a kind of quiet contempt.

His sonorous voice reached to the far edge of the throng. 'I will require one volunteer from among you,' he said. 'If someone will kindly step up—'

Everyone glanced around, or nudged his neighbour, but nobody advanced toward the platform.

The Hypnotist shrugged. 'There can be no demonstration,' he said in a weary voice, 'unless one of you is kind enough to come up. I assure you, ladies and gentlemen, the demonstration is quite harmless, quite without danger.'

He looked around expectantly and presently a young man slowly elbowed through the crowd toward the platform.

The Hypnotist helped him up the steps and seated him in a chair.

'Relax,' said the Hypnotist. 'Presently you will be asleep and you will do exactly what I tell you to do.'

The young man squirmed on the chair, grinning self-consciously toward the crowd.

The Hypnotist caught his attention, fixing his enormous eyes on him, and the young man stopped squirming.

Suddenly someone in the crowd threw a large ball of coloured popcorn toward the platform. The popcorn arched over the lights, landing squarely atop the head of the young man sitting in the chair.

He jerked sideways, almost falling off the chair, and the crowd, quiet a moment before, guffawed boisterously.

The Hypnotist was furious. He turned scarlet and literally shook with rage as he glared at the crowd.

'Who threw that?' he demanded in a choking voice. The crowd grew silent.

The Hypnotist continued to glare at them. At length

the colour left his face and he stopped trembling, but his brilliant eyes remained baleful.

Finally he nodded to the young man seated on the platform, dismissing him with brief thanks, and turned again toward the crowd.

'Due to the interruption,' he announced in a low voice, 'it will be necessary to recommence the demonstration—with a new subject. Perhaps the person who threw the popcorn would care to come up?'

At least a dozen people in the crowd turned to gaze at someone who stood half in shadow at the rear of the gathering.

The Hypnotist spotted him at once; his dark eyes seemed to smoulder. 'Perhaps,' he said in a purring, mocking voice, 'the one who interrupted is afraid to come up. He prefers to hide in the shadows and throw popcorn!'

The culprit voiced a sudden exclamation and then pushed belligerently toward the platform. His appearance was not in any way remarkable; in fact, he somewhat resembled the first young man, and any casual observer would have placed the two of them in the farm-labourer class, neither more nor less capable than the average.

The second young man sat down in the platform chair with a distinct air of defiance and for some minutes visibly fought the Hypnotist's suggestion to relax. Presently, however, his aggressiveness disappeared and he dutifully stared into the smouldering eyes opposite his own.

In another minute or two he arose at the Hypnotist's command and lay flat on his back on the hard planks of the platform. The crowd gasped.

'You will fall asleep,' the Hypnotist told him. 'You will fall asleep. You are falling asleep. You are falling asleep. You are asleep. You are asleep and you will do anything which I command you to do. Anything which I command you to do. Anything. . . .'

His voice droned on, repeating repetitious phrases, and the crowd grew perfectly silent.

Suddenly a new note entered the Hypnotist's voice and the audience became tense.

'Do not stand up—but *rise from the platform!*' the Hypnotist commanded. '*Rise from the platform!*' His dark eyes became wild and luminous-looking and the crowd shivered.

'*Rise!*'

Then the crowd drew in its collective breath with an audible start.

The young man lying rigid on the platform, without moving a muscle, began to ascend horizontally. He arose slowly, almost imperceptibly at first, but soon with a steady and unmistakable acceleration.

'*Rise!*' the Hypnotist's voice rang out.

The young man continued to ascend, until he was feet off the platform, and still he did not stop.

The crowd was sure it was some kind of trick, but in spite of themselves they stared open-mouthed. The young man appeared to be suspended and moving in mid-air without any possible means of physical support.

Abruptly the focus of the crowd's attention was shifted; the Hypnotist clasped a hand to his chest, staggered, and crumpled to the platform.

There were calls for a doctor. The barker in the checkered suit appeared out of the tent and bent over the motionless form.

He felt for a pulse, shook his head and straightened up. Someone offered a bottle of whisky, but he merely shrugged.

Suddenly a woman in the crowd screamed.

Everyone turned to look at her and a second later followed the direction of her gaze.

Immediately there were further cries—for the young man whom the Hypnotist had put to sleep was still ascending. While the crowd's attention had been distracted by the fatal collapse of the Hypnotist, he had continued to rise. He was now a good seven feet above

the platform and moving inexorably upward. Even after the death of the Hypnotist, he continued to obey the final ringing command: *'Rise!'*

The barker, eyes all but popping out of his head, made a frantic upward leap, but he was too short. His fingers barely brushed the moving figure above and he fell heavily back to the platform.

The rigid form of the young man continued to float upward, as if he were being hoisted by some kind of invisible pulley.

Women began screaming hysterically; men shouted. But no one knew what to do. A look of terror crept over the face of the barker as he stared up. Once he glanced wildly toward the sprawled shape of the Hypnotist.

'Come down, Frank! Come down!' the crowd shrieked. 'Frank! Wake up! Come down! Stop! Frank!'

But the rigid form of Frank moved ever upward. Up, up, until he was level with the top of the carnival tent, until he reached the height of the tallest trees—until he passed the trees and moved on into the soft moonlit sky of early October.

Many in the crowd threw hands over horror-stricken faces and turned away.

Those who continued to stare saw the floating form ascend into the sky until it was no more than a tiny speck, like a little cinder drifting far up near the moon.

Then it disappeared altogether.

DEARTH'S FARM

Gerald Bullett

It is really not far: our fast train does it in eighty minutes. But so sequestered is the little valley in which I have made my solitary home that I never go to town without the delicious sensation of poising my hand over a lucky-bag full of old memories. In the train I amuse myself by summoning up some of those ghosts of the past, a past not distant but sufficiently remote in atmosphere from my present to be invested with a certain sentimental glamour. 'Perhaps I shall meet you—or you.' But never yet have I succeeded in guessing what London held up her sleeve for me. She has that happiest of tricks—without which paradise will be dull indeed—the trick of surprise. In London, if in no other place, it is the unexpected that happens. For me Fleet Street is the scene *par excellence* of these adventurous encounters, and it was in Fleet Street, three months ago, that I ran across Bailey, of Queens', whom I hadn't seen for five years. Bailey is not his name, nor Queens' his college, but these names will serve to reveal what is germane to my purpose and to conceal the rest.

His recognition of me was instant; mine of him more slow. He told me his name twice; we stared at each other, and I struggled to disguise the blankness of my memory. The situation became awkward. I was the more embarrassed because I feared lest he should too odiously misinterpret my non-recognition of him, for the man was shabby and unshaven enough to be suspicious of an intentional slight. Bailey, Bailey . . . now who the devil was Bailey? And then, when he had already made a gesture of moving on, memory stirred to activity.

'Of course, I remember. Bailey. Theosophy. You used

to talk to me about theosophy, didn't you? I remember perfectly now.' I glanced at my watch. 'If you're not busy let's go and have tea somewhere.'

He smiled, with a hint of irony in his eyes, as he answered: 'I'm not busy.' I received the uncomfortable impression that he was hungry and with no ordinary hunger, and the idea kept me silent, like an awkward schoolboy, while we walked together to a tea-shop that I knew.

Seated on opposite sides of the tea-table we took stock of each other. He was thin, and his hair greying; his complexion had a soiled unhealthy appearance; the cheeks had sunk in a little, throwing into prominence the high cheekbones above which his sensitive eyes glittered with a new light, a light not of heaven. Compared with the Bailey I now remembered so well, a rather sleek young man with an almost feline love of luxury blossoming like a tropical plant in the exotic atmosphere of his Cambridge rooms, compared with that man this was but a pale wraith. In those days he had been a flaming personality, suited well—too well, for my plain taste—to the highly-coloured orientalism that he affected in his mural decorations. And co-existent in him with this lust for soft cushions and chromatic orgies, which repelled me, there was an imagination that attracted me: an imagination delighting in highly-coloured metaphysical theories of the universe. These theories, which were as fantastic as *The Arabian Nights* and perhaps as unreal, proved his academic undoing: he came down badly in his Tripos, and had to leave without a degree. Many a man has done that and yet prospered, but Bailey, it was apparent, hadn't prospered. I made the conventional inquiries, adding, 'It must be six or seven years since we met last.'

'More than that,' said Bailey morosely, and lapsed into silence. 'Look here,' he burst out suddenly, 'I'm going to behave like a cad. I'm going to ask you to lend me a pound note. And don't expect it back in a hurry.'

We both winced a little as the note changed hands. 'You've had bad luck,' I remarked, without, I hope, a hint of pity in my voice. 'What's wrong?'

He eyed me over the rim of his teacup. 'I look a lot older to you, I expect?'

'You don't look very fit,' I conceded.

'No, I don't.' His cup came down with a nervous slam upon the saucer. 'Going grey, too, aren't I?' I was forced to nod agreement. 'Yet, do you know, a month ago there wasn't a grey hair in my head. You write stories, don't you? I saw your name somewhere. I wonder if you could write my story. You may get your money back after all . . . By God, that would be funny, wouldn't it!'

I couldn't see the joke, but I was curious about his story. And after we had lit our cigarettes he told it to me, to the accompaniment of a driving storm of rain that tapped like a thousand idiot fingers upon the plate-glass windows of the shop.

2

A few weeks ago, said Bailey, I was staying at the house of a cousin of mine. I never liked the woman, but I wanted free board and lodging, and hunger soon blunts the edge of one's delicacy. She's at least ten years my senior, and all I could remember of her was that she had bullied me when I was a child into learning to read. Ten years ago she married a man named Dearth—James Dearth, the resident owner of a smallish farm in Norfolk, not far from the coast. All her relatives opposed the marriage. Relatives always do. If people waited for the approval of relatives before marrying, the world would be depopulated in a generation. This time it was religion. My cousin's people were primitive and methodical in their religion, as the name of their sect confessed; whereas Dearth professed a universal toleration that they thought

could only be a cloak for indifference. I have my own opinion about that, but it doesn't matter now. When I met the man I forgot all about religion: I was simply repelled by the notion of any woman marrying so odd a being. Rather small in build, he possessed the longest and narrowest face I have ever seen on a man of his size. His eyes were set exceptionally wide apart, and the nose, culminating in large nostrils, made so slight an angle with the rest of the face that seen in profile it was scarcely human. Perhaps I exaggerate a little, but I know no other way of explaining the peculiar revulsion he inspired in me. He met me at the station in his dog-cart, and wheezed a greeting at me. 'You're Mr Bailey, aren't you? I hope you've had an agreeable journey. Monica will be delighted.' This seemed friendly enough, and my host's conversation during the eight-mile drive did much to make me forget my first distaste of his person. He was evidently a man of wide reading, and he had a habit of polite deference that was extremely flattering, especially to me who had had more than my share of the other thing. I was cashiered during the war, you know. Never mind why. Whenever he laughed, which was not seldom, he exhibited a mouthful of very large regular teeth.

Dearth's Farm, to give it the local name, is a place with a personality of its own. Perhaps every place has that. Sometimes I fancy that the earth itself is a personality, or a community of souls locked fast in a dream from which at any moment they may awake, like volcanoes, into violent action. Anyhow Dearth's Farm struck me as being peculiarly personal, because I found it impossible not to regard its climatic changes as changes of mood. You remember my theory that chemical action is only psychical action seen from without? Well, I'm inclined to think in just the same way of every manifestation of natural energy. But you don't want to hear about my fancies. The farmhouse, which is approached by a narrow winding lane from the main road, stands high up in a kind of shallow basin

of land, a few acres ploughed but mostly grass. The countryside has a gentle prettiness more characteristic of the south-eastern counties. On three sides wooded hills slope gradually to the horizon; on the fourth side grass-land rises a little for twenty yards and then curves abruptly down. To look through the windows that give out upon this fourth side is to have the sensation of being on the edge of a steep cliff, or at the end of the world. On a still day, when the sun is shining, the place has a languid beauty, an afternoon atmosphere. You remember Tennyson's Lotus Isles, 'in which it seemed always afternoon': Dearth's Farm has something of that flavour on a still day. But such days are rare; the two or three I experienced shine like jewels in the memory. Most often that stretch of fifty or sixty acres is a gathering-ground for all the bleak winds of the earth. They seem to come simultaneously from the land and from the sea, which is six miles away, and they swirl round in that shallow basin of earth, as I have called it, like maddened devils seeking escape from a trap. When the storms were at their worst I used to feel as though I were perched insecurely on a gigantic saucer held a hundred miles above the earth. But I am not a courageous person. Monica, my cousin, found no fault with the winds. She had other fears, and I had not been with her three days before she began to confide them to me. Her overtures were as surprising as they were unwelcome, for that she was not a confiding person by nature I was certain. Her manners were reserved to the point of diffidence, and we had nothing in common save a detestation of the family from which we had both sprung. I suppose you will want to know something of her looks. She was a tall, full-figured woman, handsome for her years, with jet black hair, a sensitive face, and a complexion almost Southern in its dark colouring. I love beauty and I found pleasure in her mere presence, which did something to lighten for me the gloom that pervaded the house; but my pleasure was

innocent enough, and Dearth's watchdog airs only amused me. Monica's eyes—unfathomable pools—seemed troubled whenever they rested on me: whether by fear or by some other emotion I didn't at first know.

She chose her moment well, coming to me when Dearth was out of the house, looking after his men, and I, pleading a headache, had refused to accompany him. The malady was purely fictitious, but I was bored with the fellow's company, and sick of being dragged at his heels like a dog for no better reason than his too evident jealousy afforded.

'I want to ask a kindness of you,' she said. 'Will you promise to answer me quite frankly?' I wondered what the deuce was coming, but I promised, seeing no way out of it. 'I want you to tell me,' she went on, 'whether you see anything queer about me, about my behaviour? Do I say or do anything that seems to you odd?'

Her perturbation was so great that I smiled to hide my perception of it. I answered jocularly: 'Nothing at all odd, my dear Monica, except this question of yours. What makes you ask it?'

But she was not to be shaken so easily out of her fears, whatever they were. 'And do you find nothing strange about this household either?'

'Nothing strange at all,' I assured her. 'Your marriage is an unhappy one, but so are thousands of others. Nothing strange about that.'

'What about him?' she said. And her eyes seemed to probe for an answer.

I shrugged my shoulders. 'Are you asking for my opinion of your husband? A delicate thing to discuss.'

'We're speaking in confidence, aren't we!' She spoke impatiently, waving my politeness away.

'Well, since you ask, I don't like him. I don't like his face: it's a parody on mankind. And I can't understand why you threw yourself away on him.'

She was eager to explain. 'He wasn't always like this.

He was a gifted man, with brains and an imagination. He still is, for all I know. You spoke of his face—now how would you describe his face, in one word?’

I couldn’t help being tickled by the comedy of the situation: a man and a woman sitting in solemn conclave seeking a word by which to describe another man’s face, and that man her husband. But her air of tragedy, though I thought it ridiculous, sobered me. I pondered her question for a while, recalling to my mind’s eye the long narrow physiognomy and the large teeth of Dearth.

At last I ventured the word I had tried to avoid. ‘Equine,’ I suggested.

‘Ah!’ There was a world of relief in her voice. ‘You’ve seen it too.’

She told me a queer tale. Dearth, it appears, had a love and understanding of horses that was quite unparalleled. His wife too had loved horses and it had once pleased her to see her husband’s astonishing power over the creatures, a power which he exercised always for their good. But his benefactions to the equine race were made at a hideous cost to himself of which he was utterly unaware. Monica’s theory was too fantastic even for me to swallow, and I, as you know, have a good stomach for fantasy. You will have already guessed what it was. Dearth was growing, by a process too gradual and subtle for perception, into the likeness of the horses with whom he had so complete a sympathy. This was Mrs Dearth’s notion of what was happening to her husband. And she pointed out something significant that had escaped my notice. She pointed out that the difference between him and the next man was not altogether, or even mainly, a physical difference. In effect she said: ‘If you scrutinize the features more carefully, you will find them to be far less extraordinary than you now suppose. The poison is not in his features. It is in the psychical atmosphere he carries about with him: something which infects you with the idea of horse and makes you impose that idea on his

appearance, magnifying his facial peculiarities.' Just now I mentioned that in the early days of her marriage Monica had shared this love of horses. Later, of course, she came to detest them only one degree less than she detested her husband. That is saying much. Only a few months before my visit matters had come to a crisis between the two. Without giving any definite reason, she had confessed, under pressure, that he was unspeakably offensive to her; and since then they had met only at meals and always reluctantly. She shuddered to recall that interview, and I shuddered to imagine it. I was no longer surprised that she had begun to entertain doubts of her own sanity.

But this wasn't the worst. The worst was Dandy, the white horse. I found it difficult to understand why a white horse should alarm her, and I began to suspect that the nervous strain she had undergone was making her inclined to magnify trifles. 'It's his favourite horse,' she said. 'That's as much as saying that he dotes on it to a degree that is unhuman. It never does any work. It just roams the fields by day, and at night sleeps in the stable.' Even this didn't, to my mind, seem a very terrible indictment. If the man were mad on horses, what more natural than this petting of a particular favourite?—a fine animal, too, as Monica herself admitted. 'Roams the fields,' cried my poor cousin urgently. 'Or did until these last few weeks. Lately it has been kept in its stable, day in, day out, eating its head off and working up energy enough to kill us all.' This sounded to me like the language of hysteria, but I waited for what was to follow. 'The day you came, did you notice how pale I looked? I had had a fright. As I was crossing the yard with a pail of separated milk for the calves, that beast broke loose from the stable and sprang at me. Yes, Dandy. He was in a fury. His eyes burned with ferocity. I dodged him by a miracle, dropped the pail, and ran back to the house shrieking for help. When I entered the living-room my husband feigned to be waking out of sleep. He didn't

seem interested in my story, and I'm convinced that he had planned the whole thing.' It was past my understanding how Dearth could have made his horse spring out of his stable and make a murderous attack upon a particular woman, and I said so. 'You don't know him yet,' retorted Monica. 'And you don't know Dandy. Go and look at the beast. Go now, while James is out.'

The farmyard, with its pool of water covered in green slime, its manure and sodden straw, and its smell of pigs, was a place that seldom failed to offend me. But on this occasion I picked my way across the cobblestones thinking of nothing at all but the homicidal horse that I was about to spy upon. I have said before that I'm not a courageous man, and you'll understand that I stepped warily as I neared the stable. I saw that the lower of the two doors was made fast and with the more confidence unlatched the other.

I peered in. The great horse stood, bolt upright but apparently in a profound sleep. It was indeed a fine creature, with no spot or shadow, as far as I could discern, to mar its glossy whiteness. I stood there staring and brooding for several minutes, wondering if both Monica and I were the victims of some astounding hallucination. I had no fear at all of Dandy, after having seen him; and it didn't alarm me when, presently, his frame quivered, his eyes opened, and he turned to look at me. But as I looked into his eyes an indefinable fear possessed me. The horse stared dumbly for a moment, and his nostrils dilated. Although I half-expected him to tear his head out of the halter and prance round upon me, I could not move. I stared, and as I stared, the horse's lips moved back from the teeth in a grin, unmistakably a grin, of malign intelligence. The gesture vividly recalled Dearth to my mind. I had described him as equine, and if proof of the word's aptness were needed, Dandy had supplied that proof.

'He's come back,' Monica murmured to me, on my return

to the house. 'Ill, I think. He's gone to lie down. Have you seen Dandy?'

'Yes. And I hope not to see him again.'

But I was to see him again, twice again. The first time was that same night, from my bedroom window. Both my bedroom and my cousin's looked out upon that grassy hill of which I spoke. It rose from a few yards until almost level with the second storey of the house and then abruptly curved away. Somewhere about midnight, feeling restless and troubled by my thoughts, I got out of bed and went to the window to take an airing.

I was not the only restless creature that night. Standing not twenty yards away, with the sky for background, was a great horse. The moonlight made its white flank gleam like silver, and lit up the eyes that stared fixedly at my window.

3

For sixteen days and nights we lived, Monica and I, in the presence of this fear, a fear none the less real for being non-susceptible to definition. The climax came suddenly, without any sort of warning, unless Dearth's idiotic hostility towards myself could be regarded as a warning. The utterly unfounded idea that I was making love to his wife had taken root in the man's mind, and every day his manner to me became more openly vindictive. This was the cue for my departure, with warm thanks for my delightful holiday; but I didn't choose to take it. I wasn't exactly in love with Monica, but she was my comrade in danger and I was reluctant to leave her to face her nightmare terrors alone.

The most cheerful room in that house was the kitchen, with its red-tiled floor, its oak rafters, and its great open fireplace. And when in the evenings the lamp was lit and we sat there, listening in comfort to the everlasting gale

that raged round the house, I could almost have imagined myself happy, had it not been for the presence of my reluctant host. He was a skeleton at a feast, if you like! By God, we were a genial party. From seven o'clock to ten we would sit there, the three of us, fencing off silence with the most pitiful of small talk. On this particular night I had been chaffing him gently, though with intention, about his fancy for keeping a loaded rifle hanging over the kitchen mantelpiece; but at last I sickened of the pastime, and the conversation, which had been sustained by my efforts, lapsed. I stared at the red embers in the grate, stealing a glance now and again at Monica to see how she was enduring the discomfort of such a silence. The cheap alarm clock ticked loudly, in the way that cheap alarm clocks have. When I looked again at Dearth he appeared to have fallen asleep. I say 'appeared,' for I instantly suspected him of shamming sleep in order to catch us out. I knew that he believed us to be in love with each other, and his total lack of evidence must have occasioned him hours of useless fury. I suspected him of the most melodramatic intentions: of hoping to see a caress pass between us that would justify him in making a scene. In that scene, as I figured it, the gun over the mantelpiece might play an important part. I don't like loaded guns.

The sight of his closed lids exasperated me into a bitter speech designed for him to overhear. 'Monica, your husband is asleep. He is asleep only in order that he may wake at the chosen moment and pour out the contents of his vulgar little mind upon our heads.'

This tirade astonished her, as well it might. She glanced up, first at me, then at her husband; and upon him her eyes remained fixed. 'He's not asleep,' she said, rising slowly out of her chair.

'I know he's not,' I replied.

By now she was at his side, bending over him. 'No,'

she remarked coolly. 'He's dead.'

At those words the wind outside redoubled its fury, and it seemed as though all the anguish of the world was in its wail. The spirit of Dearth's Farm was crying aloud in a frenzy that shook the house, making all the windows rattle. I shuddered to my feet. And in the moment of my rising the wail died away, and in the lull I heard outside the window a sudden sound of feet, of pawing, horse's feet. My horror found vent in a sort of desperate mirth.

'No, not dead. James Dearth doesn't die so easily.'

Shocked by my levity, she pointed mutely to the body in the chair. But a wild idea possessed me, and I knew that my wild idea was the truth. 'Yes,' I said, 'that may be dead as mutton. But James Dearth is outside, come to spy on you and me. Can't you hear him?'

I stretched out my hand to the blind cord. The blind ran up with a rattle, and, pressed against the window, looking in upon us, was the face of the white horse, its teeth bared in a malevolent grin. Without losing sight of the thing for a moment, I backed towards the fire. Monica, divining my intention, took down the gun from its hook and yielded it to my desirous fingers. I took deliberate aim, and shot.

And then, with the crisis over, as I thought, my nerves went to rags. I sat down limply, Monica huddled at my feet; and I knew with a hideous certitude that the soul of James Dearth, violently expelled from the corpse that lay outside the window, was in the room with me, seeking to re-enter that human body in the chair. There was a long moment of agony during which I trembled on the verge of madness, and then a flush came back into the dead pallid cheeks, the body breathed, the eyes opened. . . . I had just enough strength left to drag myself out of my seat. I saw Monica's eyes raised to mine; I can never for a moment cease to see them. Three hours later I stumbled into the arms of the station-master, who put me

in the London train under the impression that I was drunk. Yes, I left alone. I told you I wasn't a courageous man.

...

4

Bailey's voice abruptly ceased. The tension in my listening mind snapped, and I came back with a jerk, as though released by a spring, to my seat in the tea-shop. Bailey's queer eyes glittered across at me for a moment, and then, their light dying suddenly out, they became infinitely weary of me and of all the sorry business of living. A rationalist in grain, I find it impossible to accept the story quite as it stands. Substantially true it may be, probably is, but that it has been distorted by the prism of Bailey's singular personality I can hardly doubt. But the angle of that distortion must remain a matter for conjecture.

No such dull reflections came then to mar my appreciation of the quality of the strange hush that followed his last words. Neither of us spoke. An agitated waitress made us aware that the shop was closing, and we went into the street without a word. The rain was unrelenting. I shrank back into the shelter of the porch while I fastened the collar of my mackintosh, and when I stepped out upon the pavement again, Bailey had vanished into the darkness.

I have never ceased to be vexed at losing him, and never ceased to fear that he may have thought the loss not unwelcome to me. My only hope is that he may read this and get into touch with me again, so that I may discharge my debt to him. It is a debt that lies heavily on my conscience—the price of this story, less one pound.

ESMERALDA

John Keir Cross

Mr Felix Broome lay on his back wide-eyed, unable to sleep. Beside him his wife, Nancy, snored raucously—a long complicated snore, starting with a sigh and ending with a staccato nasal grunt. Mr Broome, with a horrid fascination, followed the sound through all its convolutions, waiting desperately for some variation in the rhythm.

Mr Broome was forty-five. A small man, round-faced, with a little Brunette moustache. His mouth was thin and loose. He had false teeth but never wore them—he found them uncomfortable; jam pips constantly lodged behind the plate, irritating him beyond endurance. He was bald; and, since Nancy hated him bald, he wore a toupet, slightly curled.

The room in which he and Nancy were lying was above the little newsagent and tobacconist shop he had. It was in a side street in Notting Hill—not far from the Portobello Road—a bright, neat shop that did good business. Mr Broome loved it dearly. He loved the smell of it—a smell all compact of newly printed paper, cheap sweets in cardboard boxes for the children (liquorice allsorts, wine gums, dolly mixtures, sensen cachous, chocolate macaroons and whipped cream snowballs)—and, above all, tobaccos: thick black plug for chewing, tangled shag for those who liked to roll their own cigarettes, sickly yellow curly-cut, artificially scented flake, and half-a-dozen goodly mixtures in brown earthenware jars with tops that were moulded in the shapes of Negro heads. Many a time, when the shop was empty, Mr Broome would lift the top of one of these jars and sniff lovingly at

the richness within. Many a time, when no one was looking, he would slip a dolly mixture or a jelly baby into his little loose mouth and suck at it noisily and enjoyably. Or he would furtively bury himself in one of the serials in *Peg's Companion*.

He even, on one occasion, wrote a surreptitious letter to a character calling herself Wise Woman in one of the girl's papers he sold. He signed himself 'Worried' and said:

'Dear Wise Woman,—I have been married for fifteen years but am, I am afraid, very unhappy. It is not that my partner and I have any open differences, it is just that we do not seem suited to each other. We have no children. Our tastes are not dissimilar, but somehow we do not hit it off. Somehow we seem to have very little to say to each other, and so in the house there is often an atmosphere of strain and discomfort. What can I possibly do to relieve the situation?—my partner is a Roman Catholic, so divorce is out of the question, even indeed if there were any ground for divorce, which there certainly is not. Yours sincerely, etc . . .'

And next week, under a reproduction of his letter, he read Wise Woman's reply in small type:

'Dear Worried,—Alas, the sort of situation you describe is only too frequent nowadays. In so many lives I see Romance being supplanted by Boredom and Indifference. It is a pity you have no children—it is the tiny hands of children that more than anything else in the world smooth over the difficulties of married life and re-establish it in its full sanctity. They join together hearts that have drifted apart. Is it too late to think of adopting a child, if you cannot have one of your own? If this is not possible the only other thing I can suggest is that you should *try to find a common interest*. Are you fond of going to the Theatre or the Pictures? Make a habit of going once a week with your partner. I take it you yourself are not a Catholic?—try, nevertheless, to take an

intelligent interest in your partner's religion. Make conversation, plan little surprises. And with luck and determination you will yet succeed, dear Worried, in salvaging your lives. Yours in sympathy—Wise Woman.'

Mr Broome remembered this advice with bitterness, as he lay listening to Nancy's snoring. 'Make conversation, plan little surprises.' As if it were possible to make conversation with Nancy! As if it were possible to plan little surprises for Nancy! He hated Nancy—the truth of the whole matter was simply that: he hated her. He hated everything about her—he hated her voice, he hated the way she dressed, he hated her vast podgy face with its sagging cheeks, he hated the smell of her. He who was so sensitive to smells—to the rich exotic smell of tobacco and the fresh clean smell of printed paper—how could he be expected to stomach the sweaty odour that came from Nancy?—all mingled with Woolworth's scent and pink gin? He hated every single thing that she said and did. He hated her very name. Nancy! If ever a name was unsuitable it was that. Nancy! Applied to the vast flabby hulk lying beside him it was grotesque. And names, he knew, were important—either directly or indirectly—ironically. There was his own name, for instance, Felix: meaning happy (there was an example of irony if you liked!). Or there was Miss Ickman upstairs—her first name was Cynthia, and Cynthia had been the Goddess of Chastity—could anything be more ironically suitable for that bleak and rigid virgin? Or there was—but here all irony vanished and Mr Broome sighed in the darkness—a little sigh that was swallowed up and lost in the vast nasal sigh of Nancy's snoring—there was Esmeralda . . .

Nancy stirred and grunted. She heaved the bedclothes more firmly about her, and Mr Broome's right foot was uncovered. With a patient sigh he wriggled the blankets over it again.

He did not want to think quite yet of Esmeralda—not quite yet. There was a deliciousness in holding back

—in savouring the moment when at last he would permit himself to think of her. There were many stages to be gone through before he could sink finally into the dream that began: 'If only . . .'

There came a creaking of a door from Miss Ickman's flat above. Lord, Lord—was she going to play the piano—at that time of night! He strained his ears, dreading to hear the familiar sound of the screwing up of the piano stool (Miss Ickman gave lessons, so the stool was never at the right height when she herself wanted to play). It came—and a moment later the sound of a Strauss waltz drifted down through the ceiling to him, the bass grotesquely magnified. Oh hell, oh hell! Now Nancy would waken—and Nancy awake was just one degree worse than Nancy asleep.

Yet, as the music went on, he found himself, in a way, welcoming it and enjoying it. The gay dancing rhythm brought into his mind a clear and exciting vision. Never mind if the vision was borrowed from a part of the dream that strictly speaking should come later. Esmeralda

...

The snoring stopped suddenly in a long succession of short staccato grunts. Mr Broome held his breath. Nancy heaved herself over on her back.

'Felix,' she grunted. 'My God, is that bitch at it again! Stop her, Felix—knock on the ceiling.'

'It's only eleven o'clock, my love,' said Mr Broome quietly.

'It must be later than that. Besides, it's after half-past ten that you're not allowed to make a noise. Knock up, Felix—go on.'

He sighed. But he knew the routine too well. He got out of bed and, shivering, went over to the corner behind the door and picked up a long broom that lay against the wall there. Then he mounted on a chair and thumped with the end of it on the ceiling.

'Louder, Felix—louder,' hissed Nancy.

He thumped again, rhythmically. The playing stopped. The lid of the piano slammed shut angrily. Mr Broome stepped down, wearily returned the knocker to its place, and crawled into bed again.

'Thoughtless old bitch,' grunted Nancy.

'Go to sleep, my love,' said Mr Broome absently. 'Go to sleep . . .'

She snorted and turned over on her side. He had a sudden whiff of her loathsome smell. It made him feel sick. But with a curious meekness he lay still, waiting. Her breathing grew slower and heavier. Once more the snoring began.

Fifteen years of it, he thought—fifteen years of it! Why had he ever married her at all? (Yet he did know the answer to that—it belonged to the later part of the dream.) In any case, at the beginning she had been different. She had not been bulky, the way she was now. She was kinder in disposition, her voice was softer, she dressed quite passably well. On the honeymoon he had even been quite proud of her. He remembered once, as they came in from a bathe, he had overheard two men saying, as they looked at her wet figure up and down: 'A fine buxom body, that'—and he had thought: 'Yes, and it's mine—all mine . . .'

He had thought that too, before, looking sideways at her as they knelt before the priest in the little Catholic Church in Notting Hill: 'A fine buxom body, and it's all mine . . . What if I do have to sign a paper and say that our children are to be brought up in the Catholic Faith? It doesn't really matter. The main thing is that we should have children—and with that fine buxom body belonging to me, that should be the easiest thing in the world . . .!'

And now for fifteen years the buxom body had belonged to him. It had steadily grown less attractive—he had wanted it less and less. But conversely, by an irony, he had wanted the fruits of it more and more. And now he knew, finally, that there never would be any fruits from

it, he hated the vast bulk with all the vehemence he had. His letter to Wise Woman was the only outward expression his hatred had ever had—and heaven knows that timid effusion was a poor enough index to his feeling.

Mr Broome stretched out an arm and took a sip of water from the glass he kept beside his bed. A mouse stirred and scuttled in the quiet room. Outside he heard a late bus go slowly along the street. Nearer at hand a drunk man was singing mournfully, and a policeman's slow footsteps went clop-clop on the pavement. He closed his eyes. The moment had come at last—he had gone through all the preliminaries. If only . . .

If only, if only . . .

. . . She was exquisitely pretty. She was dressed in a diaphanous white frock. Her hair was fair—there was a little ribbon of pink silk in it. She was only thirteen, but not one member of the gigantic audience but was captivated and enchanted by her. She danced on and on, a small delicious figure in the glare of the footlights. A man in one of the boxes threw her a posy of flowers and she acknowledged it prettily, with a little curtsy woven into the dance. Some women behind Mr Broome in the dress circle put their heads together and began whispering. By straining his ears he could just make out an occasional word of what they said:

'Exquisite . . . Enchanting . . . Like a little fairy . . .'

The dance ended. She swept one long and beautiful curtsy and the curtain slowly fell. The applause was enormous, terrifying. The curtain went up again and she was standing there, radiant in the light, blowing kisses to the audience. People were on their feet, cheering and clapping. The stage was covered with flowers. He felt like crying he was so moved.

And as he mingled with the crowd leaving the theatre, he heard again the two women talking behind him.

'Yes, dear—her name really is Esmeralda. Esmeralda Broome—the daughter of a little man who keeps a tobac-

conist's shop in Notting Hill somewhere. She's adorable, isn't she?'

Oh God, thought Mr Broome. Oh God! If only . . .

The snoring went on remorselessly. Mr Broome was almost weeping. If he turned he could see, in the light that came in from the street, the dark shape of Nancy's head on the pillow. She lay on her back again, with her mouth wide open. Fifteen years!

He suddenly drew in his breath in a quick gasp. He lay perfectly still, staring with dilated eyes at the ceiling. Then he quietly raised himself to his knees. Still staring, he picked up the pillow he had been lying on. For a moment he stayed poised, holding it in his hands—then, with a small animal grunt, he lunged forward and crammed it on to Nancy's face.

The snoring stopped. He lay on the pillow, grunting and moaning, pressing it down with all his strength. She began to struggle—little inarticulate sounds came from beneath him. She heaved her enormous bulk on the bed—his nostrils were filled with the smell of the sweat and cheap scent. Still lying on her face, and grunting in little ecstatic gasps, he pushed his hands down under the pillow and fumbled for her throat. He felt the muscles of it twitching convulsively beneath his fingers. He squeezed with all his strength, and his fingers went deep into the flaccid flesh.

He lay like that for a long time. There was a mounting, rushing noise in his ears, like wind, or tumultuous applause. Outside he heard the clop of the feet again, as the policeman repassed the house. And he realised suddenly that all was quiet—there was no movement at all beneath him.

He rolled himself back into his own place in the bed. He listened to the silence. Then, exhausted, but with, somewhere inside him, the applause going on, he fell into a deep stupid sleep.

He opened his eyes at a quarter-past six. For a moment he

lay looking at the creeping dawn light that came through the window. Then, quite quietly and detachedly, he remembered all that had happened the night before.

He turned and looked at Nancy. The pillow lay over her head. Curiously he lifted a corner of it—then replaced it with a shudder: the face beneath was swollen and ugly—the veins stood out in purple ridges, the teeth showed right through the upper lip, so great had been the pressure.

Mr Broome got out of bed. He went over to the window and stood there thoughtfully, scratching his backside. His striped flannel pyjamas hung from him loosely—he was a small and grotesque figure in the sick light.

A few people were astir in the street. A man with a bonnet and muffler passed briskly, a blue enamelled tea-bottle sticking out of his pocket. A little hawker's cart went by, the pony nodding dejectedly in the shafts, the driver half-asleep. A lean dog sniffed round the dustbins.

Mr Broome was surprised that he did not seem to have any feelings. According to the magazines in the shop downstairs, what he had done was spectacular—people wrote stories about murderers. And here was he, in real life, a murderer—and he felt nothing—nothing at all. He had even, he remembered, fallen asleep after killing Nancy. Fallen asleep! There was no end to mystery—things never worked out in life the way they did in books.

He dressed slowly and carefully, spending a long time in settling his tie at the mirror. Before him, on the dressing-table, was Nancy's array of scent bottles. He smiled wryly as he uncorked one of them and held it to his nose. But there was work to be done, he suddenly recollected, and he set the bottle down again and went briskly out of the room.

Underneath the shop there was a deep earth-floored cellar where Mr Broome kept old boxes and papers. Here he worked furiously for about an hour. At the end

of that time there was a hole some three feet deep in a corner of the room. Mr Broome surveyed it with satisfaction, then he went upstairs to the bedroom again.

Nancy still lay quietly on the bed. This almost surprised him—he had half-expected to find her sitting at the dressing-table making herself up. But the enormous bulk was quite motionless—the pillow was still in position.

He stood surveying her for a little time. Then, bracing himself to the effort, he put his hands under her armpits and dragged her from the bed.

She was enormously heavy. He thought with irony, as he looked down along the bulging figure, swathed in a nightgown of pink chiffon, of the remark the two men had made on the beach: 'A fine buxom body, that . . .' Well, it was buxom no longer—mere clay and no more. Nancy could no longer demand his services for her body, when she had been drinking too much pink gin. There would be no more weeping agonies of resentment—no more vows of 'I won't give in to her, I won't, I *won't*'—and then giving in to her, and regretting it, and feeling ashamed and weak next morning. It was all over now. He had beaten her at last, after fifteen long years.

Somehow he got the huge sagging lump down the stairs to the cellar. He dragged it heavily, walking backwards at an angle—Nancy resting on her heels, her huge yellow toes pointing to the ceiling. With a final heave he toppled it into the damp hole he had prepared, then stood back panting.

He went up into the shop to look at the time. It was a quarter to eight—in a quarter of an hour's time the shop should be open, if all was to seem normal. With a feverishness in his movements now, he rushed downstairs and shovelled the earth over the body. Then he replaced the boxes and papers he had cleared from the corner when he was digging the hole. A last look round to see that all was normal and he went upstairs, smoothing his jacket and straightening his tie as he climbed. By two minutes past

eight the shutters were down and the shop was open.

'Good morning, Mr Broome,' said the van boy who delivered his bundle of papers. 'All right?'

'Couldn't be better, Bert,' said Mr Broome.

'And Mrs Broome OK?'

'Oh, yes,' and he smiled his little loose toothless smile. 'She's in the pink, Bert—in the pink . . .'

Now all that day, as Mr Broome worked on in his shop, he was thinking. He began in the morning by thinking how strange it was that he was so calm. He, Felix Broome, forty-five, a man of no importance, had committed a murder. He who had never been able to make up his mind to do anything had at last done one supreme and dramatic thing. He had killed his wife and buried her in the cellar—yet behold, he was calmly going about his business as if nothing had happened.

Where was the sense of guilt that was supposed to overwhelm murderers?—where were the agonies of remorse that were said to assail them? If he felt anything at all it was a sense of relief—and occasionally, mingling with it, a sense of power and achievement. Later on in the day this feeling increased. Sometimes, as he handed a paper or some tobacco to a customer, he felt like leaning over the counter and saying:

'Excuse me, sir, but I thought I would just like to let you know that I have murdered my wife. We had been married for fifteen years and I hated her, sir—she stank. So I murdered her, sir—she's downstairs in the cellar now, under three feet of earth. Anything else, sir—some pipe-cleaners, matches?'

He pictured the sensation—the startled customer scuttling from the shop and calling a policeman. And, later on, the headlines in the papers—papers that would be sold over the very counter on which he leaned. Wise Woman would get a shock if she knew that Worried, to whom she had given such excellent advice, had finished actually by

murdering his partner; 'Plan little surprises' indeed! He had planned one of the biggest surprises in history—he, Felix Broome—a man of no account and a dreamer.

At this point, as he leaned on his counter, Mr Broome sighed deeply. It need never have happened. The fifteen years of misery need never have happened. If only—if only . . .

And there came into his mind a sudden image of a white whirling skirt. Esmeralda—she would have solved it.

At lunchtime he went to the little room at the back of the shop and cut himself some bread and cheese and boiled some tea on the gas-ring. And as he chewed his meal slowly (having put in his false teeth for the purpose), he began to think over a plan of campaign. One thing was clear—he had to get out of London. And in some way he had to disguise himself. If he left off his toupee and wore his false teeth continuously, that would make a considerable difference to his appearance. Then he could shave off his moustache. Fortunately, no photographs of him existed—he had always had a horror of cameras. And he had no relatives—at least, only one: a cousin in Canada—and she had not seen him for twenty years.

He would go, he decided, to the North of England—to Bradford, say, or Burnley: one of the vague black cities, on the top of the map, he had often heard of but never visited. Upstairs, in a hole in the mattress (the very mattress on which Nancy had died), he had almost three hundred pounds—his savings. With this sum it should be possible to start a little tobacconist's shop.

It was indeed curious, he reflected again, how calm he felt. He was quite confident that he would not be found out. As soon as it grew dark he would close the shop, gather together his few more precious belongings, and simply disappear. It would be some days before anyone got suspicious because the shop was closed—there was no one likely to call. If he put a card on the door—'Closed till further notice'—that would satisfy Bert

the van boy and Miss Ickman upstairs. Eventually, no doubt, there would be a search—an advertisement about the missing Mr and Mrs Broome would appear in the Sunday papers. Perhaps one day the police would discover Nancy's remains in the cellar—but what would it matter? By that time he would have started his new business in Blackburn or wherever it was—he would be comfortably established under a new name and with a different appearance. What could he call himself? Black? Thomson? Clarke? There was, he remembered, a significance in names. What about Nancy's maiden-name—Gilbert? Too obvious, perhaps—a clue that might give him away. Yet he could always use it as a first name. A sudden curious allusion came into his mind. A few days before, he had been reading an article in one of the cheaper and more spectacular weeklies—*The Real Bluebeard*, it had been called. And he remembered that the name of the famous wife-murderer had been Gilles de Rais. Why not call himself Gilbert Ray? A good name—and a significant one. Gilbert Ray, Tobacconist and Newsagent . . .

Chuckling to himself quietly, he took out his false teeth and went back into the shop. He popped a jelly baby into his mouth to suck by way of dessert. Then he sniffed lovingly at one of the earthenware tobacco jars. It was a pity, he thought, that he would have to leave his carefully-collected stock. But still—it was only for a little while. It would not take him long to gather more—when he started up again as Gilbert Ray.

There was little doing in the way of business during the afternoon. Mr Broome found himself looking forward to six o'clock, when he could put up the shutters and start disguising himself. He had a lot to do. He had checked in a timetable that there was a train to Blackburn at 10.15—everything had to be ready by then.

He started putting up the shutters at ten to six. Then he went into the back shop again and fried himself an

egg. He was just on the point of going upstairs to the bedroom to start on his disguise, when he had a sudden uneasy thought. Had he bolted the shop door?

As he went through to examine the lock a sudden whiff of Nancy's perfume filled his nostrils. He paused—then shrugged and moved on to the door.

Surely enough, by an oversight, he had forgotten to fix the snib. With a little grunt of annoyance he stooped to remedy the mistake. And suddenly he had an overwhelming sense that someone was standing just outside. The feeling was powerful—ridiculous but powerful. A little ashamed of himself, he swung the door open—and then his little eyes grew round and his loose mouth sagged open stupidly.

A little girl in a white dress was standing facing him—a little girl whose long hair was tied charmingly in a bow of pink ribbon. And as he stared, she swept him a low and graceful curtsy.

'Esmeralda!' he gasped.

'How do you do, dear Father,' she said, with a smile. 'May I come in?'

Still smiling at him sweetly, she walked past him into the shop. He shivered—and again in his nostrils he felt a distant whiff of Nancy's Woolworth's perfume. He closed the door with a slam, locking it with trembling fingers. Then he turned and followed the little girl up the stairs in a daze.

And now they were sitting in the bedroom facing each other. She was exactly as he had pictured her so often—petite, exquisitely pretty, with small, quick gestures. She sat primly on the edge of a chair, her feet barely touching the ground—and all the time she smiled.

As for him, he did not know what to say or to do. He felt dazed—unable to comprehend what had happened—unwilling even to try to comprehend it. Was it a dream? Had he stupidly fallen asleep—at the very moment

when he ought to be packing feverishly for his flight to Blackburn? He remembered how he had fallen asleep just after he had murdered Nancy—a curious, stupid thing to do. Was he perhaps a little bit mad? After all, there must, he thought, be something unusual in a man who suddenly murders his wife—who sets about covering up his tracks with the care and calmness he had given to the task that day. He did not know—he did not know anything: except that Esmeralda, about whom he had thought and dreamed so often, was now sitting in some unaccountable way before him, smiling at him. And she was lovely—she was only thirteen, but she was lovely. He almost felt like weeping.

He realised that she was speaking to him.

‘Dear Father,’ she was saying, ‘don’t be surprised that I have come to you at last. After all, there was only one thing ever that kept me away.’

He looked up at her. Her smile was rigid—in a way it was a little frightening. He almost wished that she would relax it—yet he realised that in his dreams she always had been smiling. He had never seen her with any other expression.

‘You mean—?’ he said dazedly: and she nodded.

‘Yes. Mother. But she’s safely out of the way, isn’t she? Oh I always hoped you’d do that to her someday, Father. She was such an ugly bitch!’

There was something hideous in the way she spoke—it alarmed him. She was only thirteen. His brain was in a whirl—things were growing wild and grotesque and somehow beyond his control. If only she wouldn’t smile!

‘You see, Father,’ she went on, leaning forwards a little, ‘I would only have been the same as her. You signed a paper, you know—do you remember? Fifteen years ago! . . . You said that any children you and Nancy had would be brought up to be like her. It might have been all right at the very beginning—she was quite presentable then, wasn’t she? And she didn’t stink.’

'I don't know what you mean,' he gasped.

'Oh you do—of course you do! Do you think I don't know you, after all these years? You liked her body a lot at the beginning. Do you remember the first time you saw her without her clothes on? That time when you went to Brighton for a day and missed the last train home?—and you went to a hotel and registered as Mr and Mrs Broome? It was before you were married, Father.'

Her tone was arch and horrible. He felt himself sweating slightly under the collar.

'I hated her body,' he said, in a muffled little whisper.

'Not at first, Father,' she said. 'You can't pretend that you hated it at first. It was only later, when she began to—well, Father,' (and she sank her voice to a low salacious whisper) '*when you began to grow old!*'

There was a long silence. Mr Broome felt a curious nightmare listlessness in all his limbs—he was weak and helpless. Things had suddenly turned inside out—it was not what he had ever meant—not it at all.

'Who are you?' he gasped at length. 'Are you a dream?'

'Father, dear!' she remonstrated. 'I'm your own dear daughter! Don't you recognise me? You've seen me a hundred times in your dreams—you've heard people talking about me. I'm Esmeralda, Father dear.'

'You're not,' he said, speaking thickly, with an effort. 'You aren't Esmeralda. Esmeralda is a little girl—I mean, I've always thought of her as a little girl—if I could have—I mean, if Nancy could have . . .'

She laughed—a shrill, stagey, impersonal laugh.

'Oh Father, Father! You haven't known in the least bit what it's all been about, have you! You've thought it was all something else. You've sat in your shop and you've read the stories in the magazines, and you've thought it was all something else altogether! Poor old Father! Shall I tell you something, Father? Shall I tell you the story of your life?—the real story of your life?'

He stared at her, unable to speak. She went on smiling. And she got down from her chair and walked over towards him till she was only a yard away from him. Then she knelt down on the floor and leaned back on her heels—still smiling.

‘Do you remember, Father, thirty years ago? You were fifteen—you had just left school. You were apprenticed to a draper in the Harrow Road—Carradine’s. You were very shy. You used to blush if anyone spoke to you. And the girls called you baby-face, Father—do you remember that? Do you remember Miss Dobie, Father?’

‘Stop it—stop it,’ he groaned.

‘Oh, Father—I’m only beginning! You can’t stop me now—there’s such a lot to say. Don’t you remember—the ladies’ combinations?’

She laughed again—her eyes bright and hard and glistening. He stared at her helplessly, in horror.

‘Miss Dobie was twenty-eight, Father, and you were sixteen. She was a bitch, wasn’t she?—all the men said so. The way she used to torture you—made you go into the underwear window and dress the dummies in Carradine’s Special Line in Ladies’ Combinations!—in full view of the public, too! Beastly, wasn’t it. You hated her, Father. But you couldn’t help yourself, could you?—she was far too powerful for you. That night when she had you to her room—smuggled you into the ladies’ hostel she lived in at Earl’s Court—do you remember it, Father? You were trembling all the time—it was all so new—you were only sixteen . . .’

‘For Christ’s sake, stop it!’ he cried. ‘It’s filthy—it’s filthy! Stop it!’

‘It’s the story of your life, Father. It’s why you killed Mother. And Father—’ (and she lowered her voice to a whisper again) ‘—it’s why you created me!’

Mr Broome held his breath. He was aware of footsteps outside—they came to him as from an enormous distance. It was the policeman beginning his evening beat—walking

slowly and comfortably in a sane quiet world.

'Poor Father, poor Father,' went on the crouching figure at his feet. 'You hardly knew all this, did you? You didn't ever have a real chance. After Miss Dobie it was Alice. Do you remember Alice? You and she at the Dance Palais, just after your twenty-first birthday? Learning the Charleston. Do you remember that long spangly dress that she wore—cut square at the neck and with a low waist? And when you danced the last waltz, when the lights were low, and you were very close to her—so close that your face was buried in her hair . . . and it filled your nostrils, Father—it was like a brown shag tobacco, all stringy, but fragrant—you couldn't get enough of the scent of her . . .'

'You devil, you devil!' said Broome, in a low sobbing voice.

'I'm only telling you, Father,' she said gently, and ironically. 'I'm letting you know, that's all. It isn't what people imagine it to be, is it, Father? Nothing is—not quite. People never do things for the reasons they think they do—do they? It's always something else—something nagging on in the background . . . Oh, it was glorious last night—wasn't it, Father? That magnificent moment!'

'What do you mean?' he gasped.

'You know what I mean—when you lay on the pillow and put your hands round her throat. She was in your power, Father—at last it was that way round: someone was in your power—instead of it being the other way—you in someone else's power. That's what made it, wasn't it, Father?'

Mr Broome raised his trembling hands to clasp his temples. Something terrible and unutterably beastly had happened to him—out of the blue. He had been so calm—so infinitely superior to things. He had worked quietly in his shop all day, he had made his plans, he had been so sure of himself. And now, from nowhere, came this foul and raging insanity. He grew aware of the thin ironic

voice going on and on.

'Yes—Miss Dobie, and Alice: and the strange girl you met when you were on holiday that time at Weston-super-Mare—Margie her name was—and Enid, that you met at your cousin's farewell party, when she went to Canada, and finally Nancy. It was always the same, wasn't it, Father? Life is always the same thing, happening over and over again. That's what none of them understands, isn't it? Wise Woman has no suspicion that that's the real truth about things, has she? Or she could never write such rubbish about Romance being supplanted by Boredom and Indifference, and the Tiny Hands of Children Reuniting Parted Hearts—now could she? It's all the same thing. I bet if you met Wise Woman herself, she'd stink of scent too—and she'd be like Nancy was when she had had too many pink gins. They wouldn't leave you alone, Father—not one of them. They're all the same.'

A terrible dry sob came out of the little man on the chair.

'Esmeralda!' he cried, 'for God's sake don't say any more—don't say it! Go away—leave me. You're different—it isn't you that has been saying these things. Something has happened to my brain—I'm imagining this—it's the strain—it's been too much. I'll go away—just let me get away from this bloody room. It'll be all right then. But don't go on about these things—for Christ's sake, don't say any more.'

He remained for a long time with his eyes closed. There was a rushing noise in his head. From infinitely far away he heard the footsteps of the policeman as they passed the house again. He did not dare to look up. Above all things in the world he did not dare to encounter the beastly rigid smile of the creature on the floor.

And then he realised that she was speaking again.

'Poor Father, poor Father,' she said: and it seemed

that her tone was different—was quieter and less ironical. 'One illusion must be left—it's always the way, isn't it. The strongest man must always preserve at least *one* illusion—and you aren't a strong man, Father, are you—you're the weakest man in the world . . . Ah, you don't remember, do you? You can't see far enough down, can you? And even if you could, you couldn't piece things together, could you? They wouldn't make sense, even if you did—things never make sense, not real things. It's all a jumble—it doesn't connect. Yet sometimes, if you look at it all quickly, there suddenly seems to be a sort of thread . . .'

He still did not look up, and she went on quickly:

'The little girl, Father—the kernel of it all . . . You were thirteen—it was at school. And do you remember you were made to sit beside her, as punishment? And she smiled at you when the teacher wasn't looking. And she had a little string of cheap glass beads round her throat—and they were green—and she told you they were emeralds. Do you remember that, Father, and mark it—*emeralds*? And you were reading a book in school that year—dreadfully dull, you thought, but they made you read it. *Notre-Dame de Paris*. It was about a hunchback. And it seemed to you that there was something infinitely pitiable about that hunchback—there was something wrong with him, he was despised by everyone. He was just like you, Father.'

There was a long silence. Broome held his breath. The small voice went on.

'Yes, Father—they all despised him. Except . . . there was the girl. Do you remember the girl in that book? She was all different. She was poetry, she was romance, she was all the warm and lovely things, she was beautiful—oh, beautiful! Do you remember her name, Father?'

He did not reply.

'Oh come, Father! You're bound to remember her name. It was—?'

'Desdemona,' he said, in an almost inaudible whisper.

'Father! You always got those two mixed up! No—Desdemona was the *other* time. Don't you remember?—the other time you sat beside the little girl. It was when they took you all to the theatre that afternoon—and you were so tremendously excited. You had never been to a theatre at all before—though you had heard about them. You thought you were going to see dancing girls, didn't you, Father—but it wasn't anything like that at all. It was educational—it would be, since the school arranged it!—and it was a play—by Shakespeare. It was Desdemona who was the girl in that, Father. Her husband smothered her. You always got her mixed up with the other girl—the girl in the book—their names were so alike. Don't you remember? *She* was called—?'

'Esmeralda!' gasped Broome.

'Yes—Esmeralda! Clever Father! And the little girl sat beside you, Father—and she was dressed in white that day—and she had a little bag of sticky sweets, and she gave you some. And do you remember she wriggled in her seat, and her dress slipped up over her knees, and you sat there beside her, Father, and you looked at her, and you thought—'

She broke off. In the silence Broome heard, above him, in Miss Ickman's flat, the sound of the piano stool being screwed up. The girl spoke again, and this time all the terrible archness was back in her voice.

'Father—look at me. Look at me, Father.'

He slowly raised his head. His eyes were staring. She was regarding him with the hideous fixed smile still on her face. And as she knelt on the floor she was pulling her skirt lasciviously over her knees.

'Oh Christ!' cried Broome. 'No—no! It's abominable—it's hellish!'

He covered his eyes with his hands. There came an echo of the terrible impersonal laughter. And simultaneously, from above, there floated to his ears the strains

of the Strauss waltz he had heard the night before.

An immense shudder shook him. He opened his eyes and rose wildly to his feet. The room was empty. But all about him—suffocating him—was the smell of Nancy.

The policeman, entering the little side-street near the Portobello Road, found Broome gibbering at the door of his shop. He went inside with him—Broome seized him and made him go inside. He looked on with stolid interest while the small sobbing figure tore at the loose earth on the floor of the cellar.

And he whistled through his teeth when he saw what the little man, with an expression of mixed terror and relief on his face, disclosed.

Later, when Broome had been taken away, the policeman and his sergeant made a search of the house.

'Blimey,' said the sergeant, as they opened the door of the bedroom—'what a stink!'

'Someone's been mucking about with scent,' said the policeman.

They found that every bottle on the dressing-table had been smashed. The contents had been splashed over the room—the carpet, the walls, the bed—and then the bottles had been smashed.

'The little chap's hands were bleeding,' said the policeman. 'I thought it was the digging in the cellar—he went at it like a maniac. But it must have been this. Poor little devil—I couldn't help feeling sorry for him somehow . . .'

THE DEAD VALLEY

Ralph Adams Cram

I have a friend, Olaf Ehrensvard, a Swede by birth, who yet, by reason of a strange and melancholy mischance of his early boyhood, has thrown his lot with that of the New World. It is a curious story of a headstrong boy and a proud and relentless family: the details do not matter here, but they are sufficient to weave a web of romance around the tall yellow-bearded man with the sad eyes and the voice that gives itself perfectly to plaintive little Swedish songs remembered out of childhood. In the winter evenings we play chess together, he and I, and after some close, fierce battle has been fought to a finish—usually with my own defeat—we fill our pipes again, and Ehrensvard tells me stories of the far, half-remembered days in the fatherland, before he went to sea: stories that grow very strange and incredible as the night deepens and the fire falls together, but stories that, nevertheless, I fully believe.

One of them made a strong impression on me, so I set it down here, only regretting that I cannot reproduce the curiously perfect English and the delicate accent which to me increased the fascination of the tale. Yet, as best I can remember it, here it is.

'I never told you how Nils and I went over the hills to Hallsberg, and how we found the Dead Valley, did I? Well, this is the way it happened. I must have been about twelve years old, and Nils Sjoberg, whose father's estate joined ours, was a few months younger. We were inseparable just at that time, and whatever we did, we did together.

'Once a week it was market day in Engelholm, and Nils and I went always there to see the strange sights

that the market gathered from all the surrounding country. One day we quite lost our hearts, for an old man from across the Elfborg had brought a little dog to sell, that seemed to us the most beautiful dog in all the world. He was a round, woolly puppy, so funny that Nils and I sat down on the ground and laughed at him, until he came and played with us in so jolly a way that we felt that there was only one really desirable thing in life, and that was the little dog of the old man from across the hills. But alas! we had not half money enough wherewith to buy him, so we were forced to beg the old man not to sell him before the next market day, promising that we would bring the money for him then. He gave us his word, and we ran home very fast and implored our mothers to give us money for the little dog.

'We got the money, but we could not wait for the next market day. Suppose the puppy should be sold! The thought frightened us so that we begged and implored that we might be allowed to go over the hills to Hallsberg where the old man lived, and get the little dog ourselves, and at last they told us we might go. By starting early in the morning we should reach Hallsberg by three o'clock, and it was arranged that we should stay there that night with Nils's aunt, and leaving by noon the next day, be home again by sunset.

'Soon after sunrise we were on our way, after having received minute instructions as to just what we should do in all possible and impossible circumstances, and finally a repeated injunction that we should start for home at the same hour the next day, so that we might get safely back before nightfall.

'For us, it was magnificent sport, and we started off with our rifles; full of the sense of our very great importance; yet the journey was simple enough, along a good road, across the big hills we knew so well, for Nils and I had shot over half the territory of this side of the dividing range of the Elfborg. Back of Engelholm lay a

valley, from which rose the low mountains, and we had to cross this, and then follow the road along the side of the hills for three or four miles, before a narrow path branched off to the left, leading up through the pass.

'Nothing occurred of interest on the way over, and we reached Hallsberg in due season, found to our inexpressible joy that the little dog was not sold, secured him, and so went to the house of Nils's aunt to spend the night.

'Why we did not leave early on the following day, I can't quite remember; but at all events, I know we stopped at a shooting range just outside of the town, where most attractive paste-board pigs were sliding slowly through painted foliage, serving so as beautiful marks. The result was that we did not get fairly started for home until afternoon, and as we found ourselves at last pushing up the side of the mountains with the sun dangerously near their summits, I think we were a little scared at the prospect of the examination and possible punishment that awaited us when we got home at midnight.

'Therefore we hurried as fast as possible up the mountainside, while the blue dusk closed in about us, and the light died in the purple sky. At first we had talked hilariously, and the little dog had leaped ahead of us with the utmost joy. Latterly, however, a curious oppression came on us; we did not speak or even whistle, while the dog fell behind, following us with hesitation in every muscle.

'We had passed through the foothills and the low spurs of the mountains, and were almost at the top of the main range, when life seemed to go out of everything, leaving the world dead, so suddenly silent the forest became, so stagnant the air. Instinctively we halted to listen.

'Perfect silence—the crushing silence of deep forests at night; and more, for always, even in the most impenetrable fastnesses of the wooded mountains, is the multitudinous murmur of little lives, awakened by the darkness, exaggerated and intensified by the stillness of

the air and the great dark: but here and now the silence seemed unbroken even by the turn of a leaf, the movement of a twig, the note of night bird or insect. I could hear the blood beat through my veins: the crushing of the grass under our feet as we advanced with hesitating steps sounded like the falling of trees.

'And the air was stagnant—dead. The atmosphere seemed to lie upon my body like the weight of sea on a diver who has ventured too far into its awful depths. What we usually call silence seems so only in relation to the din of ordinary experience. This was silence in the absolute, and it crushed the mind while it intensified the senses, bringing down the awful weight of inextinguishable fear.

'I know that Nils and I stared toward each other in abject terror, listening to our quick, heavy breathing that sounded to our acute senses like the fitful rush of waters. And the poor little dog we were leading justified our terror. The black oppression seemed to crush him even as it did us. He lay close to the ground, moaning feebly and dragging himself painfully and slowly closer to Nils's feet. I think this exhibition of utter animal fear was the last touch, and must inevitably have blasted our reason—mine anyway, but just then, as we stood quaking, on the bounds of madness, came a sound, so awful, so ghastly, so horrible, that it seemed to rouse us from the dead spell that was on us.

'In the depth of the silence came a cry, beginning as a low, sorrowful moan, rising to a tremulous shriek, culminating in a yell that seemed to tear the night in sunder and rend the world as by a cataclysm. So fearful was it that I could not believe it had actual existence; it passed previous experience, the powers of belief, and for a moment I thought it the result of my own animal terror, an hallucination born of tottering reason.

'A glance at Nils dispelled this thought in a flash. In the pale light of the high stars he was the embodiment

of all possible human fear, quaking with an ague, his jaw fallen, his tongue out, his eyes protruding like those of a hanged man. Without a word, we fled, the panic of fear giving us strength, and together, the little dog caught close in Nils's arms, we sped down the side of the cursed mountains—anywhere, goal was of no account: we had but one impulse—to get away from that place.

'So under the black trees and the far white stars that flashed through the still leaves overhead, we leaped down the mountainside, regardless of path or landmark, straight through the tangled underbrush, across mountain streams, through fens and copses, anywhere, so only that our course was downward.

'How long we ran thus, I have no idea, but by and by the forest fell behind, and we found ourselves among the foothills, and fell exhausted on the dry short grass, panting like tired dogs.

'It was lighter here in the open, and presently we looked around to see where we were, and how we were to strike out in order to find the path that would lead us home. We looked in vain for a familiar sign. Behind us rose the great wall of black forest on the flank of the mountain: before us lay the undulating mounds of low foothills, unbroken by trees or rocks, and beyond, only the fall of black sky bright with multitudinous stars that turned its velvet depth to a luminous grey.

'As I remember, we did not speak to each other once: the terror was too heavy on us for that, and by and by we rose simultaneously and started out across the hills.

'Still the same silence, the same dead, motionless air—air that was at once sultry and chilling: a heavy heat struck through with an icy chill that felt almost like the burning of frozen steel. Still carrying the helpless dog, Nils pressed on through the hills, and I followed close behind. At last, in front of us, rose a slope of moor touching the white stars. We climbed it wearily, reached the top, and found ourselves gazing down into a great,

smooth valley, filled halfway to the brim with—what?

‘As far as the eye could see stretched a level plain of ashy white, faintly phosphorescent, a sea of velvet fog that lay like motionless water, or rather like a floor of alabaster, so dense did it appear, so seemingly capable of sustaining weight. If it were possible, I think that sea of dead white mist struck even greater terror into my soul than the heavy silence or the deadly cry—so ominous was it, so utterly unreal, so phantasmal, so impossible, as it lay there like a dead ocean under the steady stars. Yet through that mist *we must go!* there seemed no other way home, and, shattered with abject fear, mad with the one desire to get back, we started down the slope to where the sea of milky mist ceased, sharp and distinct around the stems of the rough grass.

‘I put one foot into the ghostly fog. A chill as of death struck through me, stopping my heart, and I threw myself backward on the slope. At that instant came again the shriek, close, close, right in our ears, in ourselves, and far out across the damnable sea I saw the cold fog lift like a waterspout and toss itself high in writhing convolutions toward the sky. The stars began to grow dim as thick vapour swept across them, and in the growing dark I saw a great, watery moon lift itself slowly above the palpitating sea, vast and vague in the gathering mist.

‘This was enough: we turned and fled along the margin of the white sea that throbbed now with fitful motion below us, rising, rising, slowly and steadily, driving us higher and higher up the side of the foothills.

‘It was a race for life; that we knew. How we kept it up I cannot understand, but we did, and at last we saw the white sea fall behind us as we staggered up the end of the valley, and then down into a region that we knew, and so into the old path. The last thing I remember was hearing a strange voice, that of Nils, but horribly changed, stammer brokenly, “The dog is dead!” and then the whole world turned around twice, slowly and resistlessly, and

consciousness went out with a crash.

'It was some three weeks later, as I remember, that I awoke in my own room, and found my mother sitting beside the bed. I could not think very well at first, but as I slowly grew strong again, vague flashes of recollection began to come to me, and little by little the whole sequence of events of that awful night in the Dead Valley came back. All that I could gain from what was told me was that three weeks before I had been found in my own bed, raging sick, and that my illness grew fast into brain fever. I tried to speak of the dread things that had happened to me, but I saw at once that no one looked on them save as the hauntings of a dying frenzy, and so I closed my mouth and kept my own counsel.

'I must see Nils, however, and so I asked for him. My mother told me that he also had been ill with a strange fever, but that he was now quite well again. Presently they brought him in, and when we were alone I began to speak to him of the night on the mountain. I shall never forget the shock that struck me down on my pillow when the boy denied everything; denied having gone with me, ever having heard the cry, having seen the valley, or feeling the deadly chill of the ghostly fog. Nothing would shake his determined ignorance, and in spite of myself I was forced to admit that his denials came from no policy of concealment, but from blank oblivion.

'My weakened brain was in a turmoil. Was it all but the floating phantasm of delirium? Or had the horror of the real thing blotted Nils's mind into blankness so far as the events of the night in the Dead Valley were concerned? The latter explanation seemed the only one, else how explain the sudden illness which in a night had struck us both down? I said nothing more, either to Nils or to my own people, but waited, with a growing determination that, once well again, I would find that valley if it really existed.

'It was some weeks before I was really well enough to go, but finally, late in September, I chose a bright, warm, still day, the last smile of the dying summer, and started early in the morning along the path that led to Hallsberg. I was sure I knew where the trail struck off to the right, down which we had come from the valley of dead water, for a great tree grew by the Hallsberg path at the point where, with a sense of salvation, we had found the home road. Presently we saw it to the right, a little distance ahead.

'I think the bright sunlight and the clear air had worked as a tonic to me, for by the time I came to the foot of the great pine, I had quite lost faith in the verity of the vision that haunted me, believing at last that it was indeed but the nightmare of madness. Nevertheless, I turned sharply to the right, at the base of the tree, into a narrow path that led through a dense thicket. As I did so I tripped over something. A swarm of flies sung into the air around me, and looking down I saw the matted fleece, with the poor little bones thrusting through, of the dog we had bought in Hallsberg.

'Then my courage went out with a puff, and I knew that it all was true, and that now I was frightened. Pride and the desire for adventure urged me on, however, and I pressed into the close thicket that barred my way. The path was hardly visible; merely the worn road of some small beasts, for, though it showed in the crisp grass, the bushes above grew thick and hardly penetrable. The land rose slowly, and rising grew clearer, until at last I came out on a great slope of hill, unbroken by trees or shrubs, very like my memory of that rise of land we had topped in order that we might find the Dead Valley and the icy fog. I looked at the sun; it was bright and clear, and all around insects were humming in the autumn air, and birds were darting to and fro. Surely there was no danger, not until nightfall at least; so I began to whistle,

and with a rush mounted the last crest of brown hill.

'There lay the Dead Valley! A great oval basin, almost as smooth and regular as though made by man. On all sides the grass crept over the brink of the encircling hills, dusty green on the crests, then fading into ashy brown, and so to a deadly white, this last colour forming a thin ring, running in a long white line, this around the slope. And then? Nothing. Bare, brown, hard earth, glittering with grains of alkali, but otherwise dead and barren. Not a tuft of grass, not a stick of brushwood, not even a stone, but only the vast expanse of beaten clay.

'In the midst of the basin, perhaps a mile and a half away, the level expanse was broken by a great dead tree, rising leafless and gaunt into the air. Without a moment's hesitation I started down into the valley and made for this goal. Every particle of fear seemed to have left me, and even the valley itself did not look so very terrifying. At all events, I was driven by an overwhelming curiosity, and there seemed to be but one thing in the world to do—to get to that tree! As I trudged along over the hard earth, I noticed that the multitudinous voices of birds and insects had died away. No bee or butterfly hovered through the air, no insects leaped or crept over the dull earth. The very air itself was stagnant.

'As I drew near the skeleton tree, I noticed the glint of sunlight on a kind of white mound around its roots, and I wondered curiously. It was not until I had come close that I saw its nature.

'All around the roots and barkless trunk was heaped a wilderness of little bones. Tiny skulls of rodents and of birds, thousands of them, rising about the dead tree and streaming off for several yards in all directions, until the dreadful pile ended in isolated skulls and scattered skeletons. Here and there a larger bone appeared—the thigh of a sheep, the hoofs of a horse, and to one side, grinning slowly, a human skull.

'I stood quite still, staring with all my eyes, when suddenly the dense silence was broken by a faint, forlorn cry high over my head. I looked up and saw a great falcon turning and sailing downward just over the tree. In a moment more she fell motionless, on the bleaching bones.

'Horror struck me, and I rushed for home, my brain whirling, a strange numbness growing in me. I ran steadily, on and on. At last I glanced up. Where was the rise of the hill? I looked around wildly. Close before me was the dead tree with its pile of bones. I had circled it round and round, and the valley wall was still a mile and a half away.

'I stood dazed and frozen. The sun was sinking, red and dull, toward the line of hills. In the east the dark was growing fast. Was there still time? *Time!* It was not *that* I wanted, it was *will!* My feet seemed clogged as in a nightmare. I could hardly drag them over the barren land. And then I felt the slow chill creeping through me. I looked down. Out of the earth a thin mist was rising, collecting in little pools that grew ever larger until they joined here and there, their currents swirling slowly like thin blue smoke. The western hills halved the copper sun. When it was dark I should hear that shriek again, and then I should die. I knew that, and with every remaining atom of will I staggered toward the red west through the writhing mist that crept clammy around my ankles, retarding my steps.

'And as I fought my way off from the tree, the horror grew, until at last I thought I was going to die. The silence pursued me like dumb ghosts, the air still held my breath, the hellish fog caught at my feet like cold hands.

'But I won! though not a moment too soon. As I crawled on my hands and knees up the brown slope, I heard, far away and high in the air, the cry that already had almost bereft me of reason. It was faint and vague, but unmistakable in its horrible intensity. I glanced behind. The

fog was dense and pallid, heaving undulously up the brown slope. The sky was gold under the setting sun, but below was the ashy grey of death. I stood for a moment on the brink of this sea of hell, and then leaped down the slope. The sunset opened before me, the night closed behind, and as I crawled home weak and tired, darkness shut down on the Dead Valley.'

THE VISIT TO THE MUSEUM

Vladimir Nabokov

Several years ago a friend of mine in Paris—a person with oddities, to put it mildly—learning that I was going to spend two or three days at Montisert, asked me to drop in at the local museum where there hung, he was told, a portrait of his grandfather by Leroy. Smiling and spreading out his hands, he related a rather vague story to which I confess I paid little attention, partly because I do not like other people's obtrusive affairs, but chiefly because I had always had doubts about my friend's capacity to remain this side of fantasy. It went more or less as follows: after the grandfather died in their St Petersburg house back at the time of the Russo-Japanese War, the contents of his apartment in Paris were sold at auction. The portrait, after some obscure peregrinations, was acquired by the museum of Leroy's native town. My friend wished to know if the portrait was really there; if there, if it could be ransomed; and if it could, for what price. When I asked why he did not get in touch with the museum, he replied that he had written several times, but had never received an answer.

I made an inward resolution not to carry out the request—I could always tell him I had fallen ill or changed my itinerary. The very notion of seeing sights, whether they be museums or ancient buildings, is loathsome to me; besides, the good freak's commission seemed absolute nonsense. It so happened, however, that, while wandering about Montisert's empty streets in search of a stationery store, and cursing the spire of a long-necked cathedral, always the same one, that kept popping up at the end of every street, I was caught in a violent down-pour which immediately went about accelerating the fall of

the maple leaves, for the fair weather of a southern October was holding on by a mere thread. I dashed for cover and found myself on the steps of the museum.

It was a building of modest proportions, constructed of many-coloured stones, with columns, a gilt inscription over the frescoes of the pediment, and a lion-legged stone bench on either side of the bronze door. One of its leaves stood open, and the interior seemed dark against the shimmer of the shower. I stood for a while on the steps, but, despite the overhanging roof, they were gradually growing speckled. I saw that the rain had set in for good, and so, having nothing better to do, I decided to go inside. No sooner had I trod on the smooth, resonant flagstones of the vestibule than the clatter of a moved stool came from a distant corner, and the custodian—a banal pensioner with an empty sleeve—rose to meet me, laying aside his newspaper and peering at me over his spectacles. I paid my franc and, trying not to look at some statues at the entrance (which were as traditional and as insignificant as the first number in a circus programme), I entered the main hall.

Everything was as it should be: grey tints, the sleep of substance, matter dematerialized. There was the usual case of old, worn coins resting in the inclined velvet of their compartments. There was, on top of the case, a pair of owls, Eagle Owl and Long-eared, with their French names reading 'Grand Duke' and 'Middle Duke' if translated. Venerable minerals lay in their open graves of dusty papier-mâché; a photograph of an astonished gentleman with a pointed beard dominated an assortment of strange black lumps of various sizes. They bore a great resemblance to frozen frass, and I paused involuntarily over them for I was quite at a loss to guess their nature, composition and function. The custodian had been following me with felted steps, always keeping a respectful distance; now, however, he came up, with one hand behind his back and the ghost of the other in his pocket, and

gulping, if one judged by his Adam's apple.

'What are they?' I asked.

'Science has not yet determined,' he replied, undoubtedly having learned the phrase by rote. 'They were found,' he continued in the same phony tone, 'in 1895, by Louis Pradier, Municipal Councillor and Knight of the Legion of Honour,' and his trembling finger indicated the photograph.

'Well and good,' I said, 'but who decided, and why, that they merited a place in the museum?'

'And now I call your attention to this skull!' the old man cried energetically, obviously changing the subject.

'Still, I would be interested to know what they are made of,' I interrupted.

'Science . . .' he began anew, but stopped short and looked crossly at his fingers, which were soiled with dust from the glass.

I proceeded to examine a Chinese vase, probably brought back by a naval officer; a group of porous fossils; a pale worm in clouded alcohol; a red-and-green map of Montisert in the seventeenth century; and a trio of rusted tools bound by a funereal ribbon—a spade, a mattock and a pick. 'To dig in the past,' I thought absentmindedly, but this time did not seek clarification from the custodian, who was following me noiselessly and meekly, weaving in and out among the display cases. Beyond the first hall there was another, apparently the last, and in its centre a large sarcophagus stood like a dirty bathtub, while the walls were hung with paintings.

At once my eye was caught by the portrait of a man between two abominable landscapes (with cattle and 'atmosphere'). I moved closer and, to my considerable amazement, found the very object whose existence had hitherto seemed to me but the figment of an unstable mind. The man, depicted in wretched oils, wore a frock coat, whiskers and a large pince-nez on a cord; he bore a likeness to Offenbach, but, in spite of the work's vile

conventionality, I had the feeling one could make out in his features the horizon of a resemblance, as it were, to my friend. In one corner, meticulously traced in carmine against a black background, was the signature *Leroy* in a hand as commonplace as the work itself.

I felt a vinegarish breath near my shoulder, and turned to meet the custodian's kindly gaze. 'Tell me,' I asked, 'supposing someone wished to buy one of these paintings, whom should he see?'

'The treasures of the museum are the pride of the city,' replied the old man, 'and pride is not for sale.'

Fearing his eloquence, I hastily concurred, but nevertheless asked for the name of the museum's director. He tried to distract me with the story of the sarcophagus, but I insisted. Finally he gave me the name of one M. Godard and explained where I could find him.

Frankly, I enjoyed the thought that the portrait existed. It is fun to be present at the coming true of a dream, even if it is not one's own. I decided to settle the matter without delay. When I get in the spirit, no one can hold me back. I left the museum with a brisk, resonant step, and found that the rain had stopped, blueness had spread across the sky, a woman in besplattered stockings was spinning along on a silver-shining bicycle, and only over the surrounding hills did clouds still hang. Once again the cathedral began playing hide-and-seek with me, but I outwitted it. Barely escaping the onrushing tyres of a furious red bus packed with singing youths, I crossed the asphalt thoroughfare and a minute later was ringing at the garden gate of M. Godard. He turned out to be a thin, middle-aged gentleman in high collar and dickey, with a pearl in the knot of his tie, and a face very much resembling a Russian wolfhound; as if that were not enough, he was licking his chops in a most doglike manner, while sticking a stamp on an envelope, when I entered his small but lavishly furnished room with its malachite inkstand on the desk and a strangely familiar Chinese vase on the

mantel. A pair of fencing foils hung crossed over the mirror, which reflected the narrow grey back of his head. Here and there photographs of a warship pleasantly broke up the blue flora of the wallpaper.

'What can I do for you?' he asked, throwing the letter he had just sealed into the wastebasket. This act seemed unusual to me; however, I did not see fit to interfere. I explained in brief my reason for coming, even naming the substantial sum with which my friend was willing to part, though he had asked me not to mention it, but wait instead for the museum's terms.

'All this is delightful,' said M. Godard. 'The only thing is, you are mistaken—there is no such picture in our museum.'

'What do you mean there is no such picture? I have just seen it! Portrait of a Russian nobleman, by Gustave Leroy.'

'We do have one Leroy,' said M. Godard when he had leafed through an oilcloth notebook and his black fingernail had stopped at the entry in question. 'However, it is not a portrait but a rural landscape: The Return of the Herd.'

I repeated that I had seen the picture with my own eyes five minutes before and that no power on earth could make me doubt its existence.

'Agreed,' said M. Godard, 'but I am not crazy either. I have been curator of our museum for almost twenty years now and know this catalogue as well as I know the Lord's Prayer. It says here Return of the Herd and that means the herd is returning, and, unless perhaps your friend's grandfather is depicted as a shepherd, I cannot conceive of his portrait's existence in our museum.'

'He is wearing a frock coat,' I cried. 'I swear he is wearing a frock coat!'

'And how did you like our museum in general?' M. Godard asked suspiciously. 'Did you appreciate the sarcophagus?'

'Listen,' I said (and I think there was already a tremor in my voice), 'do me a favour—let's go there this minute, and let's make an agreement that if the portrait is there, you will sell it.'

'And if not?' inquired M. Godard.

'I shall pay you the sum anyway.'

'All right,' he said. 'Here, take this red-and-blue pencil and using the red—the red, please—put it in writing for me.'

In my excitement I carried out his demand. Upon glancing at my signature, he deplored the difficult pronunciation of Russian names. Then he appended his own signature and, quickly folding the sheet, thrust it into his waistcoat pocket.

'Let's go,' he said, freeing a cuff.

On the way he stepped into a shop and bought a bag of sticky looking caramels which he began offering me insistently; when I flatly refused, he tried to shake out a couple of them into my hand. I pulled my hand away. Several caramels fell on the sidewalk; he stopped to pick them up and then overtook me at a trot. When we drew near the museum we saw the red tourist bus (now empty) parked outside.

'Aha,' said M. Godard, pleased. 'I see we have many visitors today.'

He doffed his hat and, holding it in front of him, walked decorously up the steps.

All was not well at the museum. From within issued rowdy cries, lewd laughter, and even what seemed like the sound of a scuffle. We entered the first hall; there the elderly custodian was restraining two sacrilegists who wore some kind of festive emblems in their lapels and were altogether very purple-faced and full of pep as they tried to extract the municipal councillor's merds from beneath the glass. The rest of the youths, members of some rural athletic organization, were making noisy fun, some of the worm in alcohol, others of the skull. One

joker was in rapture over the pipes of the steam radiator, which he pretended was an exhibit; another was taking aim at an owl with his fist and forefinger. There were about thirty of them in all, and their motion and voices created a condition of crush and thick noise.

M. Godard clapped his hands and pointed at a sign reading 'Visitors to the Museum must be decently attired.' Then he pushed his way, with me following, into the second hall. The whole company immediately swarmed after us. I steered Godard to the portrait; he froze before it, chest inflated, and then stepped back a bit, as if admiring it, and his feminine heel trod on somebody's foot.

'Splendid picture,' he exclaimed with genuine sincerity. 'Well, let's not be petty about this. You were right, and there must be an error in the catalogue.'

As he spoke, his fingers, moving as it were on their own, tore up our agreement into little bits which fell like snowflakes into a massive spittoon.

'Who's the old ape?' asked an individual in a striped jersey, and, as my friend's grandfather was depicted holding a glowing cigar, another funster took out a cigarette and prepared to borrow a light from the portrait.

'All right, let us settle on the price,' I said, 'and, in any case, let's get out of here.'

'Make way, please!' shouted M. Godard, pushing aside the curious.

There was an exit, which I had not noticed previously, at the end of the hall and we thrust our way through to it.

'I can make no decision,' M. Godard was shouting above the din. 'Decisiveness is a good thing only when supported by law. I must first discuss the matter with the mayor, who has just died and has not yet been elected. I doubt that you will be able to purchase the portrait but nonetheless I would like to show you still other treasures of ours.'

We found ourselves in a hall of considerable dimensions. Brown books, with a half-baked look and coarse, foxed

pages, lay open under glass on a long table. Along the walls stood dummy soldiers in jack-boots with flared tops.

'Come, let's talk it over,' I cried out in desperation, trying to direct M. Godard's evolutions to a plush-covered sofa in a corner. But in this I was prevented by the custodian. Flailing his one arm, he came running after us, pursued by a merry crowd of youths, one of whom had put on his head a copper helmet with a Rembrandtesque gleam.

'Take it off, take it off!' shouted M. Godard, and someone's shove made the helmet fly off the hooligan's head with a clatter.

'Let us move on,' said M. Godard, tugging at my sleeve, and we passed into the section of Ancient Sculpture.

I lost my way for a moment among some enormous marble legs, and twice ran around a giant knee before I again caught sight of M. Godard, who was looking for me behind the white ankle of a neighbouring giantess. Here a person in a bowler, who must have clambered up her, suddenly fell from a great height to the stone floor. One of his companions began helping him up, but they were both drunk, and, dismissing them with a wave of the hand, M. Godard rushed on to the next room, radiant with Oriental fabrics; there hounds raced across azure carpets, and a bow and quiver lay on a tiger skin.

Strangely, though, the expanse and motley only gave me a feeling of oppressiveness and imprecision, and, perhaps because new visitors kept dashing by or perhaps because I was impatient to leave the unnecessarily spreading museum and amid calm and freedom conclude my business negotiations with M. Godard, I began to experience a vague sense of alarm. Meanwhile we had transported ourselves into yet another hall, which must have been really enormous, judging by the fact that it housed the entire skeleton of a whale, resembling a frigate's frame; beyond were visible still other halls, with the oblique

sheen of large paintings, full of storm clouds, among which floated the delicate idols of religious art in blue and pink vestments; and all this resolved itself in an abrupt turbulence of misty draperies, and chandeliers came aglitter and fish with translucent frills meandered through illuminated aquariums. Racing up a staircase, we saw, from the gallery above, a crowd of grey-haired people with umbrellas examining a gigantic mock-up of the universe.

At last, in a sombre but magnificent room dedicated to the history of steam machines, I managed to halt my carefree guide for an instant.

'Enough!' I shouted. 'I'm leaving. We'll talk tomorrow.'

He had already vanished. I turned and saw, scarcely an inch from me, the lofty wheels of a sweaty locomotive. For a long time I tried to find the way back among models of railroad stations. How strangely glowed the violet signals in the gloom beyond the fan of wet tracks, and what spasms shook my poor heart! Suddenly everything changed again: in front of me stretched an infinitely long passage, containing numerous office cabinets and elusive, scurrying people. Taking a sharp turn, I found myself amid a thousand musical instruments; the walls, all mirror, reflected an enfilade of grand pianos, while in the centre there was a pool with a bronze Orpheus atop a green rock. The aquatic theme did not end here as, racing back, I ended up in the Section of Fountains and Brooks, and it was difficult to walk along the winding, slimy edges of those waters.

Now and then, on one side or the other, stone stairs, with puddles on the steps, which gave me a strange sensation of fear, would descend into misty abysses, whence issued whistles, the rattle of dishes, the clatter of typewriters, the ring of hammers and many other sounds, as if, down there, were exposition halls of some kind or other, already closing or not yet completed. Then I found myself in darkness and kept bumping into unknown furniture until I finally saw a red light and walked out onto

a platform that clanged under me—and suddenly, beyond it, there was a bright parlour, tastefully furnished in Empire style, but not a living soul, not a living soul. . . . By now I was indescribably terrified, but every time I turned and tried to retrace my steps along the passages, I found myself in hitherto unseen places—a greenhouse with hydrangeas and broken windowpanes with the darkness of artificial night showing through beyond; or a deserted laboratory with dusty alembics on its tables. Finally I ran into a room of some sort with coat-racks monstrously loaded down with black coats and astrakhan furs; from beyond a door came a burst of applause, but when I flung the door open, there was no theatre, but only a soft opacity and splendidly counterfeited fog with the perfectly convincing blotches of indistinct street-lights. More than convincing! I advanced, and immediately a joyous and unmistakable sensation of reality at last replaced all the unreal trash amid which I had just been dashing to and fro. The stone beneath my feet was real sidewalk, powdered with wonderfully fragrant, newly fallen snow in which the infrequent pedestrians had already left fresh black tracks. At first the quiet and the snowy coolness of the night, somehow strikingly familiar, gave me a pleasant feeling after my feverish wanderings. Trustfully, I started to conjecture just where I had come out, and why the snow, and what were those lights exaggeratedly but indistinctly beaming here and there in the brown darkness. I examined and, stooping, even touched a round spur stone on the curb, then glanced at the palm of my hand, full of wet granular cold, as if hoping to read an explanation there. I felt how lightly, how naïvely I was clothed, but the distinct realization that I had escaped from the museum's maze was still so strong that, for the first two or three minutes, I experienced neither surprise nor fear. Continuing my leisurely examination, I looked up at the house beside which I was standing and was immediately struck by the sight of iron steps and

railings that descended into the snow on their way to the cellar. There was a twinge in my heart, and it was with a new, alarmed curiosity that I glanced at the pavement, at its white cover along which stretched black lines, at the brown sky across which there kept sweeping a mysterious light, and at the massive parapet some distance away. I sensed that there was a drop beyond it; something was creaking and gurgling down there. Further on, beyond the murky cavity, stretched a chain of fuzzy lights. Scuffling along the snow in my soaked shoes, I walked a few paces, all the time glancing at the dark house on my right; only in a single window did a lamp glow softly under its green-glass shade. Here, a locked wooden gate. . . . There, what must be the shutters of a sleeping shop. . . . And by the light of a streetlamp whose shape had long been shouting to me its impossible message, I made out the ending of a sign—'. . . *inka Sapog*' (. . . *oe Repair*')—but no, it was not the snow that had obliterated the 'hard sign' at the end. 'No, no, in a minute I shall wake up,' I said aloud, and, trembling, my heart pounding, I turned, walked on, stopped again. From somewhere came the receding sound of hooves, the snow sat like a skullcap on a slightly leaning spur stone, and indistinctly showed white on the woodpile on the other side of the fence, and already I knew, irrevocably, where I was. Alas, it was not the Russia I remembered, but the factual Russia of today, forbidden to me, hopelessly slavish, and hopelessly my own native land. A semi-phantom in a light foreign suit, I stood on the impassive snow of an October night, somewhere on the Moyka or the Fontanka Canal, or perhaps on the Obvodny, and I had to do something, go somewhere, run, desperately protect my fragile, illegal life. Oh, how many times in my sleep I had experienced a similar sensation! Now, though, it was reality. Everything was real—the air that seemed to mingle with scattered snowflakes, the still unfrozen canal, the floating fish house, and that peculiar squareness of

the darkened and the yellow windows. A man in a fur cap, with a briefcase under his arm, came toward me out of the fog, gave me a startled glance, and turned to look again when he had passed me. I waited for him to disappear and then, with a tremendous haste, began pulling out everything I had in my pockets, ripping up papers, throwing them into the snow and stamping them down. There were some documents, a letter from my sister in Paris, five-hundred francs, a handkerchief, cigarettes; however, in order to shed all the integument of exile, I would have to tear off and destroy my clothes, my linen, my shoes, everything, and remain ideally naked; and, even though I was already shivering from my anguish and from the cold, I did what I could.

But enough. I shall not recount how I was arrested, nor tell of my subsequent ordeals. Suffice it to say that it cost me incredible patience and effort to get back abroad, and that, ever since, I have foresworn carrying out commissions entrusted one by the insanity of others.

NOTE: The unfortunate narrator notices a shop sign and realizes he is not in the Russia of his past but in the Russia of the Soviets: what gives it away is the absence of one letter which used to decorate the end of words after consonants but is now omitted in the reformed orthography.

Vladimir Nabokov

GONE AWAY

A. E. Coppard

Three people were touring through France in a fast motor car, John Lavenham and Mary his wife, with their friend Anson, a morose man who could not speak French and complained of the absence of mountains—had they been in the Alps he would have snorted over the absence of boulevards. It was a fine August morning, sparkling, glorious. They had gone through a city called Rouen, a town by the name of Beauvais, and were now pouring over a vast plain burdened from end to end with its million shocks of ripe corn, which Anson declared was the nearest blessed thing to a champaign that his eyes had ever seen. Well, that was soft-rolling Picardy. There were also the advertisements of M. Dubonnet's tonique and avenues of trees—maple, chestnut, and poplar of all kinds—which began nowhere and ended, like time itself, in the hereafter. The three travellers in the car were dejected, although there was nothing to daunt the spirit in those ineffable leagues. Far from the bedecked and Baedekered bathing places the plain had ripened and fulfilled itself and was snoozing placidly under the sun, serene, triumphant, with its little brooks cataracting everlastingly over their quiet stones. But the three in the car were joyless and dispirited, some melancholy had grown upon them. In one week they had journeyed a thousand miles in a sheer rush of enjoyment—one thousand and seventy-eight miles to be precise—but a disquiet they could give no name to had brushed them with its sinister wing. It wasn't vague autumn, the fall of the year, or the monotonous vista of trees; it was some personal prevision, common to all three, of the turn (as it were) of a tide that would not flow in for ever. And it was, to a faint

degree, unnerving.

'This visibility,' remarked John at the wheel, 'seems quite unreal, like crystal.'

'Crystal's real enough,' said Anson.

'So's a feather bed, but you can't see through it.'

'You can sleep on it.'

'You can't sleep on crystal,' snapped John.

'Who wants to? And what the deuce are you stinging me for, anyway?'

'I'm not stinging you, my dear fellow. I only say the visibility is marvellous.'

'So it is. All right, all right. It's a miracle.'

Mary, who was sitting beside her husband, called over her shoulder to Anson in the back of the car:

'Perhaps . . . if it were more picturesque here . . . don't you think . . .?'

'It's picturesque enough,' he stubbornly replied.

'Well . . . but something a little more . . . you know . . . unlike what we expected . . .?'

'What did we expect?' he asked.

'O . . . I don't know . . . it looks as if there was no end to anything!'

'Well, there isn't,' Anson snorted.

John, at the wheel, giggled grimly. 'Sing something,' he said.

'What?'

'Anything a bit lively.'

Anson reflected: 'Could you endure,' he asked, 'a mildly bawdy song?'

'Just as you like,' John answered; but Mary said: 'No. O gracious no, not this morning.'

For a while Anson sat fumbling with his depression. No end! May be; there is change. World without end, yes! The plain diminishes as the towns encompass it, the roads straighten or swerve anew, the high old tower falls, the tree dies and from its myriad seeds renews again. Yet it all takes no account of *me*! I'm a nonentity, I'm ignored

as though I were doomed from the beginning! But I am *not* doomed, I swear I am not, I will not be. 'Shall we, do you think,' he shouted to John, 'be able to get a *Times* at the next town? I feel shockingly cut off from everything. Haven't seen a newspaper for a week.'

At that moment John was slowing up the car to go over a small stiff narrow bridge. It had a pert yellow sign upon it.

'What the devil does that say?' John stopped the car under the trees. There was a brook under the bridge, and on either hand fields swarming with stooks undulated to the skyline. For some moments he and Mary tried to translate the inscription on the sign, but it was difficult and Anson could give them no help.

'As far as I can make out, it means The Bridge of the Hump-backed Donkey,' said John; and Mary dubiously agreed.

'Sounds a little sarcastic.' Anson sighed. 'Where *are* we?'

'Don't quite know,' John slowly said. 'And it wouldn't be that.'

'Wouldn't be what?'

'Sarcastic—not in France. It means something—something else.'

Mary, studying a map, enquired: 'How far have we come this morning, John?'

John glanced at the speedometer, then bent—and stared and stared.

'Nine . . . thousand . . . miles!'

'Don't be absurd,' Mary exclaimed.

'Well, look at it! It's going now—and we've stopped! The damn thing has gone wrong somehow. We've come . . . what d'ye think . . . nine thousand miles this morning, Anson! That's going some! Look at the blessed thing.'

All three stared at the face of the instrument. The little red figures denoting a furlong kept flicking on. A mile was registered in a flash. Then another.

'What a nuisance!' laughed John. 'Must get it seen to at the next stop if I can.'

'And I must get a *Times* if I can,' added Anson. 'I feel done without a *Times*. What's our next town?'

'It ought to be . . . but I can't seem to make anything out this morning,' stammered Mary.

'There's a milestone along there,' John interjected, and he drove the car slowly along to the stone. It stood under a maple tree, a bone-white pillar with a painted red cap.

John stared at it. Mary stared at it.

'What does it say?' asked Anson.

'Well, it's a rum 'un,' John said. 'A rough translation would be: *A thousand miles to here!*'

'Here? Where is here?'

'That's what's so rum. That's what it doesn't tell you. I've never seen a stone like that before. We must have a look at it.'

They all got out of the car and walked up to the inscrutable stone. At the back of it they found another inscription which said: *A thousand miles to there!*

'It does begin to look a bit sarcastic, after all,' laughed Anson.

They gazed around. There was not a living being in sight.

'I'd like to take a photograph of that,' said John.

The road lay straight for miles under its endless avenue of trees. No sound of a car reached them, or of bird or beast, no voice of a child, only the leaves on the trees faintly hissing. There was a pronounced smell of straw from the corn shocks. And they became aware of a stranger thing as they peered into the view beside the trees. Far ahead in the gleaming distance they could perceive a high hill with the roofs and towers of a city on its top, too far to define and yet clear enough to the casual eye. But what puzzled them all was the sight of something continually puffing up into the air above the hill and then bursting and falling back again, faint curving frills of smoke

that shot up with the regularity of a beating pulse, that died and reappeared. Again and again. It looked as though fireworks, huge rockets, were ascending and breaking. But you did not send up fireworks during the day! With the sun so brightly shining, too!

'O God!' exclaimed Mary. 'It's an earthquake.'

'No, it's an explosion,' Anson quickly said. 'Might be an arsenal blowing up.'

'That's no arsenal,' said John. 'Come on, let's bundle off and have a look at it.'

'No, no, please, John!' cried Mary.

'Aw, it's all right,' he replied soothingly. 'What's the matter? We must have a look at it. We won't go too near, only somewhere where we can see it. We might be of some use, you never know. Come on.'

All scrambled into the car.

'My! If this damn speedometer isn't smashing all records! Look! Done another five thousand! Did you ever see anything like it? How can the thing go on when the car's not moving?'

'Let's go back, John,' pleaded Mary with a bruised air.

'Back! Go back! Where? We can't go back—not now.'

'I wish you would,' said she. 'I feel . . . you *know* . . . you know how I feel?'

'I don't,' he said. 'How *do* you feel?'

'I really can't tell you,' answered she. 'It's ghastly, all this earthquake and things going wrong.'

'Pooh!' John edged in the clutch and the car slid off again into the lane of trees. For ten minutes they sped along without speaking, the endless trees screening them from all view of the fiery city, until Mary begged John not to go so fast.

'I can't tell *how* fast we are going,' he explained. 'The speedometer says a million miles an hour. We'll stop and have a look at those fireworks again—it u'll be nearer now.'

They stopped and emerged. There was blankness beyond the avenue of trees. There was no hill, no city, no explosions. Time had spread its fickle placidity over all the plain once more. Corn, and shocks of corn, feeble brooks, the wide sky, trees, low uplands, and measureless distance.

'That's where it was,' murmured the astounded John. 'There *was* a hill, it was over there.'

'It certainly *was* there,' Anson agreed.

'I do wish we had not come,' Mary was unnerved.

'I know!' cried John. 'It must have been a mirage! You remember we couldn't hear any noises.' His face brightened again. 'And we ought to have heard something. I've seen them before—not in this latitude, though. Fancy that! A mirage!'

'Was the milestone a mirage?' asked Anson.

'Probably,' laughed the other. 'And the donkey bridge, too—all the lot of it.'

'And the speedometer?'

They turned back to the car again and peered in.

'O lord! Thousands of miles more. Look at it. Thousands, and the damn thing won't stop!'

They reseated themselves. John lit a cigar. Anson munched an apple. Mary sat with closed eyes. The car plunged on. It came suddenly into a considerable town, all cobbled, with tramlines, shops, markets, and a place covered with smooth yellow sand. In the centre of the place was a white marble statue of Joan of Arc standing on a mat of red geraniums, with a live pigeon on her head.

'What's this place?'

Mary did not recognise it at all.

'Dash it!' growled John, 'I know this town, I know it well, but I can't think of its name. There's a paper shop here though, Anson, halfway up the Rue des Enfers, just along here; Dunoyer's the name, here we are.'

He swung the car round into a narrow street and halfway

up, sure enough, there was the shop of M. Dunoyer. Anson and Mary both went into the shop but M. Dunoyer was profusely desolated; it was deplorable, but he had not got a copy of *The Times*, but it might be, yes, he was almost certain that it could be obtained at the shop of M. Thievenot in the next street, a street and shop that he described with spirited gestures as he smiled the couple back into the car. John drove on to the end of the street where there was a square with a market of toys and clothing in progress. Cursing the one-way direction, John had to drive right around the square before gliding into the street of M. Thievenot—and then Mary said it was not the right turning. But John was positive, Anson was certain, so Mary said it didn't matter a bit.

There was no newspaper shop in that street, no sign of M. Thievenot living or dead, and the car soon emerged on a main thoroughfare full of converging traffic.

'Ah, I see what we've done!' cried Anson. 'I can tell you where we are now. I know exactly where he is. I'll run across and get it.'

There and then he stepped out of the car.

'No, no, get in again! I can't wait for you here in the middle of all these trams!' stormed John. 'I must get on a bit further.'

'That's all right,' Anson answered. 'It's only just across the way—two minutes. You go on, I'll find you all right.'

And without more ado he dashed off between the passing carts and cars.

'Where? Where will you meet us?' John yelled after him. But Anson was gone.

'Silly ass!' John exploded. 'Suppose he gets lost! He's never been here before, he can't speak a word of French, and I've got his passport! Nice pickle he'd be in—and so would we. Damn fool!'

But the car had to get out of the road and they drove on a little way until they found themselves once more at the place with the statue of Joan of Arc.

There they waited.

'He'll easily find us here,' said John to Mary. 'You look out for him that way and I'll look this.'

They waited for ten minutes.

'Now the ninny has gone and lost himself. I knew that u'd happen.'

But Mary said: 'I expect he is only looking at the shops.'

Another ten minutes passed by with still no sign of Anson, and Lavenham began to fume:

'O God help that fool!'

'Don't quote scripture, please John,' said Mary apprehensively.

And he said: 'No, all right, I won't quote it. Hadn't you better go and look for him? I'll stop with the car in case he turns up here while you're gone.'

So off went Mary. The last he saw of her through the traffic was her blue shoes tripping across the cobbles towards a block of shops.

John sat in the car. He did not want to get out of it, he liked cars and it was a hot day, too hot to go twiddling about on the plage. The trams clanging, the cars hooting with every imaginable torture of sound, and the rattle of carts on the stones, were not things to his liking—he wanted to get away from this town. Lolling back he reviled the fat-headed Anson who had gone chasing after *The Times* and gazed moodily out of the open window at Joan of Arc amid her geraniums, at people footing idly across the neat yellow sand of the plage or sitting on seats perusing the news with their legs crossed. Four young priests came gaily by in their long black cassocks and Roman hats; they were all smoking thin cigars. A dirty-looking pigeon sipped and bathed in the basin of the fountain; when it fluttered to the ground close to the car it left wet triangular footprints where it walked. By and by, despite the noise, Lavenham fell into a doze.

On waking up he felt sour and ugly. For a moment he

had forgotten his whereabouts and did not want to stir. He frowned at the statue of the peerless Joan, and a lanky little girl in a pink tunic who was passing with a fish on a string, but the traffic uproar bit into his consciousness like a hornet at its prey and he sat up sweating most infernally, yawned, blasted, and found he was alone. Mary was gone. Anson was gone. Then he remembered they had gone after *The Times* at M. Thievenot's.

His watch was on his wrist. He stared at it—shook it. It had stopped. How long had he been asleep? He could not tell. His watch said it was twelve o'clock, but that was just the time it had registered when they were at The Bridge of the Hump-backed Donkey! It must have stopped there. It was damn silly. He got out of the car and walked about until he saw a clock tower and a clock that denoted three-thirty. Three-thirty! That must be wrong, too. He crossed the road, and peering into a shop doorway saw another clock. It was three-thirty all right! He must have slept, he must have slept, let's see, he must have been sleeping at least an hour, an hour at least! More than an hour, much more! A nasty anxious feeling assailed him. Something must have happened to Mary—or that idiot Anson! Or could they—would they—have gone to have lunch without him? O no, she wouldn't do that. Besides, it was long past lunching time. Running back to his car he drove off in it slowly to the shop of M. Dunoyer, searching right and left as he advanced. No, neither the lady nor the gentleman had called there again. Receiving once more the most explicit directions to M. Thievenot's he was soon at that establishment, but nothing was known of Anson or Mary. Neither had called, M. Thievenot was positive of that. Lavenham rushed back to the place in his car. Of course, he had been a fool not to have left it there and walked to these shops. Mary or Anson might have returned there and not found him. Lavenham was now thoroughly agitated. It must have been two hours

since Anson disappeared. And he had never reached the shop. Neither had Mary. Had they been kidnapped? Or had there been an accident to one of them—perhaps both? Where was the hospital? Off in the car he shot again. 'This infernal traffic! These blasted lunatics of people!' He ran over a dog but would not stop until he reached the hospital and blundered up the steps.

No, not there. No accident. No news. Nothing.

Distractedly he fled to the Chief of Police, who was at hand in a quiet street full of offices displaying the golden shields of notaries over the doorways. The police station was in a courtyard and Lavenham drove in under an arch. Jumping from the car he hurried into the office and announced his errand. He was conducted to the room of the Chief, a suave official with the demeanour of a hawk. In stammering French Lavenham explained his predicament.

'Your name, Monsieur? Your passport.' And so on. Then the Chief listened to Lavenham's story and scribbled notes on a pad of paper. Smoking with extreme deliberation a cigar of crumpled design he contrived to make light of the whole affair. Two hours? That was a mere nothing—what was two hours? His off-hand manner only increased Lavenham's perturbation. The Chief spoke soothingly to him. Whence had he come? Whither was he going?

'Come?' Lavenham had to reflect. Where *had* they stayed last night? He racked his brains, but *could* not remember! Monsieur the Chief smiled, and Lavenham explained that his mind and recollection had been upset by the occurrences of the morning. To begin with, there was the earthquake. . . .

'Earthquake?'

'Yes. Or no, no, it wasn't. It looked like an earthquake at first but it turned out to be a mirage.'

The officer stared; 'Where was this, Monsieur?'

'Where?—That also I cannot tell you.'

The Frenchman, sitting sideways with one arm over the back of his chair and his legs nonchalantly crossed, pursed his lips and dropped his pencil resignedly on the paper pad.

'You see,' Lavenham explained, 'my speedometer has gone wrong. I cannot tell. It says we have come twenty thousand miles this morning.'

'Monsieur! But that is impossible!'

'It is impossible, but that is what it says. And that is not all.'

The Chief stood up. He said he would like to see this speedometer. They walked out to the courtyard together. The courtyard was empty. Lavenham's car was gone.

Lavenham ran out under the arch. The Chief followed him. There was no sign of the car in the street.

Well, but, was Monsieur quite sure he came in his car? It could not have been stolen from the courtyard of the police! Lavenham was really frightened now and could only babble away hysterically in English:

'What does it all mean! Anson's gone. My wife's gone. The car's gone. What is the meaning of that? What does it all mean? Am I mad, or is it the end of the world? What is the meaning of it? Tell me, please!'

The Chief took him soothingly by the arm and led him firmly back into the police station. The attendant gendarme was questioned: had he seen M. Lavenham arrive? Did he notice M. Lavenham's car?

No, he had not seen this car. Possibly there had been a car, but he had not noticed its arrival; he had been engaged in the office, he could not say. Beckoning the gendarme to follow them the Chief led Lavenham along a passage and thence into a corridor where there were many doors. The gendarme unlocked one with a key from a bunch he was carrying. The Chief ushered Lavenham into a dim room that had only a table and a bench in it.

'Monsieur will please to wait here while I make some

enquiries for him. Yes, in a few moments.'

And assuring him that he would find out all about everything, the police Chief backed out of the door. The door was abruptly closed and Lavenham was bolted in. Good Lord! He realised he was in a cell! Was he going to be locked up? There were iron bars across the little window. He stood up and peered out. All he could see was the gable end of a big building overtopping a high wall, and on it was an inscription painted in yellow and blue:

SUZE

L'ami de l'estomac

He couldn't help laughing at it, laughing aloud. 'The friend—ha, ha—of the stomach—ha, ha; ho, ho; good Lord above!'

The Chief of police and the gendarme were conferring in whispers outside the cell. At those sounds of delirious laughter the Chief raised his tufty eyebrows and shrugged his shoulders. The gendarme nodded his head. Monsieur the Chief then returned to his office and telephoned for the prison doctor to come and examine an Englishman who had been smitten with sunstroke; he had lost himself and seemed a little mad.

And so, in half an hour the doctor came. As they proceeded together to the cell the Chief explained M. Lavenham's condition: Earthquakes! You know—his wife gone, his friend gone, his car gone! The gendarme unlocked the door in the corridor and the doctor peered in.

The cell was silent and empty. Lavenham, too, was gone.

GOVERNOR MANCO AND THE SOLDIER

Washington Irving

When Governor Manco, or 'the one-armed', kept up a show of military state in the Alhambra, he became nettled at the reproaches continually cast upon his fortress, of being a nestling-place of rogues and contrabandistas. On a sudden, the old potentate determined on reform; and setting vigorously to work, ejected whole nests of vagabonds out of the fortress and the gipsy caves with which the surrounding hills are honeycombed. He sent out soldiers also, to patrol the avenues and footpaths, with orders to take up all suspicious persons.

One bright summer morning, a patrol, consisting of the testy old corporal who had distinguished himself in the affair of the notary, a trumpeter, and two privates, was seated under the garden-wall of the Generalife, beside the road, which leads down from the Mountain of the Sun, when they heard the tramp of a horse, and a male voice singing in rough, though not unmusical tones, an old Castilian campaigning song.

Presently they beheld a sturdy, sun-burnt fellow, clad in the ragged garb of a foot-soldier, leading a powerful Arabian horse, caparisoned in the ancient Moresco fashion.

Astonished at the sight of a strange soldier, descending, steed in hand, from that solitary mountain, the corporal stepped forth and challenged him.

'Who goes there?'

'A friend.'

'Who and what are you?'

'A poor soldier just from the wars, with a cracked crown and empty purse for a reward.'

By this time they were enabled to view him more narrowly. He had a black patch across his forehead,

which, with a grizzled beard, added to a certain dare-devil cast of countenance; while a slight squint threw into the whole an occasional gleam of roguish good humour.

Having answered the questions of the patrol, the soldier seemed to consider himself entitled to make others in return. 'May I ask,' he said, 'what city is that which I see at the foot of the hill?'

'What city!' cried the trumpeter; 'come, that's too bad. There's a fellow lurking about the Mountain of the Sun, and demands the name of the great city of Granada!'

'Granada! *Madre di Dios!* can it be possible?'

'Perhaps not!' rejoined the trumpeter; 'and perhaps you have no idea that yonder are the towers of the Alhambra?'

'Son of a trumpet,' replied the stranger, 'do not trifle with me; if this be indeed the Alhambra, I have some strange matters to reveal to the governor.'

'You will have an opportunity,' said the corporal, 'for we mean to take you before him.' By this time the trumpeter had seized the bridle of the steed, the two privates had each secured an arm of the soldier, the corporal put himself in front, gave the word, 'Forward—march!' and away they marched for the Alhambra.

The sight of a ragged foot-soldier and a fine Arabian horse, brought in captive by the patrol, attracted the attention of all the idlers of the fortress, and of those gossip groups that generally assemble about wells and fountains at early dawn. The wheel of the cistern paused in its rotations, and the slip-shod servant-maid stood gaping, with pitcher in hand, as the corporal passed by with his prize. A motley train gradually gathered in the rear of the escort.

Knowing nods and winks and conjectures passed from one to another. 'It is a deserter,' said one; 'A contrabandista,' said another; 'A bandalero,' said a third;—until it was affirmed that a captain of a desperate band of robbers had been captured by the prowess of the cor-

poral and his patrol. 'Well, well,' said the old crones, one to another, 'captain or not, let him get out of the grasp of old Governor Manco if he can, though he is but one-handed.'

Governor Manco was seated in one of the inner halls of the Alhambra, taking his morning's cup of chocolate in company with his confessor, a fat Franciscan friar, from the neighbouring convent. A demure, dark-eyed damsel of Malaga, the daughter of his housekeeper, was attending upon him. The world hinted that the damsel, who, with all her demureness, was a sly buxom baggage, had found out a soft spot in the iron heart of the old governor, and held complete control over him. But let that pass—the domestic affairs of these mighty potentates of the earth should not be too narrowly scrutinized.

When word was brought that a suspicious stranger had been taken lurking about the fortress, and was actually in the outer court, in durance of the corporal, waiting the pleasure of his excellency, the pride and stateliness of office swelled the bosom of the governor. Giving back his chocolate-cup into the hands of the demure damsel, he called for his basket-hilted sword, girded it to his side, twirled up his mustachios, took his seat in a large high-backed chair, assumed a bitter and forbidding aspect, and ordered the prisoner into his presence. The soldier was brought in, still closely pinioned by his captors, and guarded by the corporal. He maintained, however, a resolute self-confident air, and returned the sharp, scrutinizing look of the governor with an easy squint, which by no means pleased the punctilious old potentate.

'Well, culprit,' said the governor, after he had regarded him for a moment in silence, 'what have you to say for yourself—who are you?'

'A soldier, just back from the wars, who has brought away nothing but scars and bruises.'

'A soldier—humph—a foot-soldier by your garb. I understand you have a fine Arabian horse. I presume you

brought him too from the wars, beside your scars and bruises.'

'May it please your excellency, I have something strange to tell about that horse. Indeed I have one of the most wonderful things to relate: something too that concerns the security of this fortress, indeed of all Granada. But it is a matter to be imparted only to your private ear, or in presence of such only as are in your confidence.'

The governor considered for a moment, and then directed the corporal and his men to withdraw, but to post themselves outside of the door, and be ready at a call. 'This holy friar,' said he, 'is my confessor, you may say anything in his presence—and this damsel,' nodding towards the handmaid, who had loitered with an air of great curiosity, 'this damsel is of great secrecy and discretion, and to be trusted with anything.'

The soldier gave a glance between a squint and a leer at the demure handmaid. 'I am perfectly willing,' said he, 'that the damsel should remain.'

When all the rest had withdrawn, the soldier commenced his story. He was a fluent, smooth-tongued varlet, and had a command of language above his apparent rank.

'May it please your excellency,' said he, 'I am, as I before observed, a soldier, and have seen some hard service, but my term of enlistment being expired, I was discharged, not long since, from the army at Valladolid, and set out on foot for my native village in Andalusia. Yesterday evening the sun went down as I was traversing a great dry plain of Old Castile.'

'Hold,' cried the Governor, 'what is this you say? Old Castile is some two or three hundred miles from this.'

'Even so,' replied the soldier coolly, 'I told your excellency, I had strange things to relate; but not more strange than true; as your excellency will find, if you will deign me a patient hearing.'

'Proceed, culprit,' said the governor, twirling up his mustachios.

'As the sun went down,' continued the soldier, 'I cast my eyes about in search of some quarters for the night, but, far as my sight could reach, there were no signs of a habitation. I saw that I should have to make my bed on the naked plain, with my knapsack for a pillow; but your excellency is an old soldier, and knows that to one who has been in the wars, such a night's lodging is no great hardship.'

The governor nodded assent, as he drew his pocket-handkerchief out of the basket-hilt, to drive away a fly that buzzed about his nose.

'Well, to make a long story short,' continued the soldier, 'I trudged forward for several miles until I came to a bridge over a deep ravine, through which ran a little thread of water, almost dried up by the summer heat. At one end of the bridge was a Moorish tower, the upper end all in ruins, but a vault in the foundation quite entire. Here, thinks I, is a good place to make a halt; so I went down to the stream, took a hearty drink, for the water was pure and sweet, and I was parched with thirst; then, opening my wallet, I took out an onion and a few crusts, which were all my provisions, and seating myself on a stone on the margin of the stream, began to make my supper, intending afterwards to quarter myself for the night in the vault of the tower; and capital quarters they would have been for a campaigner just from the wars, as your excellency, who is an old soldier, may suppose.'

'I have put up gladly with worse in my time,' said the governor, returning his pocket-handkerchief into the hilt of his sword.

'While I was quietly crunching my crust,' pursued the soldier, 'I heard something stir within the vault; I listened—it was the tramp of a horse. By and by, a man came forth from a door in the foundation of the tower, close by the water's edge, leading a powerful horse by the bridle. I could not well make out what he was, by the

star-light. It had a suspicious look to be lurking among the ruins of a tower, in that wild solitary place. He might be a mere wayfarer, like myself; he might be a contra-bandista; he might be a bandalero! what of that? thank Heaven and my poverty, I had nothing to lose; so I sat still and crunched my crusts.

‘He led his horse to the water, close by where I was sitting, so that I had a fair opportunity of reconnoitring him. To my surprise he was dressed in a Moorish garb, with a cuirass of steel, and a polished skull-cap that I distinguished by the reflection of the stars upon it. His horse, too, was harnessed in the Moresco fashion, with great shovel-stirrups. He led him, as I said, to the side of the stream, into which the animal plunged his head almost to his eyes, and drank until I thought he would have burst.

‘Comrade,’ said I, ‘your steed drinks well; it’s a good sign when a horse plunges his muzzle bravely into the water.’

‘“He may well drink,” said the stranger, speaking with a Moorish accent, “it is a good year since he had his last draught.”

‘“By Santiago,” said I, “that beats even the camels that I have seen in Africa. But come, you seem to be something of a soldier, will you sit down and take part of a soldier’s fare?” In fact, I felt the want of a companion in this lonely place, and was willing to put up with an infidel. Besides, as your excellency well knows, a soldier is never very particular about the faith of his company, and soldiers of all countries are comrades on peaceable ground.’

The governor again nodded assent.

‘Well, as I was saying, I invited him to share my supper, such as it was, for I could not do less in common hospitality. “I have no time to pause for meat or drink,” said he, “I have a long journey to make before morning.”

‘“In which direction?” said I.

‘“Andalusia,” said he.

"Exactly my route," said I; "so, as you won't stop and eat with me, perhaps you will let me mount and ride with you. I see your horse is of a powerful frame, I'll warrant he'll carry double."

"Agreed," said the trooper; and it would not have been civil and soldier-like to refuse, especially as I had offered to share my supper with him. So up he mounted, and up I mounted behind him.

"Hold fast," said he, "my steed goes like the wind."

"Never fear me," said I, and so off we set.

From a walk the horse soon passed to a trot, from a trot to a gallop, and from a gallop to a harum scarum scamper. It seemed as if rocks, trees, houses, everything, flew hurry-scurry behind us.

"What town is this?" I said.

"Segovia," said he; and before the word was out of his mouth, the towers of Segovia were out of sight. We swept up the Guadarama mountains, and down by the Escorial; and we skirted the walls of Madrid, and we scoured away across the plains of La Mancha. In this way we went up hill and down dale, by towers and cities, all buried in deep sleep, and across mountains, and plains, and rivers, just glimmering in the starlight.

To make a long story short, and not to fatigue your excellency, the trooper suddenly pulled up on the side of a mountain. "Here we are," said he, "at the end of our journey." I looked about, but could see no habitation; nothing but the mouth of a cavern. While I looked I saw multitudes in Moorish dresses, some on horseback, some on foot, arriving as if borne by the wind from all points of the compass, and hurrying into the mouth of the cavern, like bees into a hive. Before I could ask a question, the trooper struck his long Moorish spurs into the horse's flanks and dashed in with the throng. We passed along a steep winding way, that descended into the very bowels of the mountain. As we pushed on, a light began to glimmer up, by little and little, like the first glimmerings

of day, but what caused it I could not discern. It grew stronger and stronger, and enabled me to see everything around. I now noticed, as we passed along, great caverns, opening to the right and left, like halls in an arsenal. In some there were shields, and helmets, and cuirasses, and lances, and scimitars, hanging against the walls; in others there were great heaps of warlike munitions, and camp-equipage, lying upon the ground.

‘It would have done your excellency’s heart good, being an old soldier, to have seen such grand provision for war. Then, in other caverns, there were long rows of horsemen armed to the teeth, with lances raised and banners unfurled, all ready for the field; but they all sat motionless in their saddles like so many statues. In other halls were warriors sleeping on the ground beside their horses, and foot-soldiers in groups ready to fall into the ranks. All were in old-fashioned Moorish dress and armour.

‘Well, your excellency, to cut a long story short, we at length entered an immense cavern, or I may say palace, of grotto-work, the walls of which seemed to be veined with gold and silver, and to sparkle with diamonds and sapphires and all kinds of precious stones. At the upper end sat a Moorish king on a golden throne, with his nobles on each side, and a guard of African blacks with drawn scimitars. All the crowd that continued to flock in, and amounted to thousands and thousands, passed one by one before his throne, each paying homage as he passed. Some of the multitude were dressed in magnificent robes without stain or blemish, and sparkling with jewels; others were in burnished and enamelled armour; while others were in mouldered and mildewed garments, and in armour all battered and dented and covered with rust.

‘I had hitherto held my tongue, for your excellency well knows, it is not for a soldier to ask many questions when on duty, but I could keep silent no longer.

“Pr’ythee, comrade,” said I, “what is the meaning of all this?”

“This,” said the trooper, “is a great and fearful mystery. Know, O Christian, that you see before you the court and army of Boabdil the last king of Granada.”

“What is this you tell me?” cried I. “Boabdil and his court were exiled from the land hundreds of years ago, and all died in Africa.”

“So it is recorded in your lying chronicles,” replied the Moor, “but know that Boabdil and the warriors who made the last struggle for Granada were all shut up in the mountain by powerful enchantment. As for the king and army that marched forth from Granada at the time of the surrender, they were a mere phantom train, of spirits and demons permitted to assume those shapes to deceive the Christian sovereigns. And furthermore let me tell you, friend, that all Spain is a country under the power of enchantment. There is not a mountain cave, not a lonely watch-tower in the plains, nor ruined castle on the hills, but has some spellbound warriors sleeping from age to age within its vaults, until the sins are expiated for which Allah permitted the dominion to pass for a time out of the hands of the faithful. Once every year, on the eve of St John, they are released from enchantment from sunset to sunrise, and permitted to repair here to pay homage to their sovereign; and the crowds which you beheld swarming into the cavern are Moslem warriors from their haunts in all parts of Spain. For my own part, you saw the ruined tower of the bridge in Old Castile, where I have now wintered and summered for many hundred years, and where I must be back again by day-break. As to the battalions of horses and foot which you beheld drawn up in array in the neighbouring caverns, they are the spell-bound warriors of Granada. It is written in the book of fate, that when the enchantment is broken, Boabdil will descend from the mountain at the head of this army, resume his throne in the Alhambra

and his sway of Granada, and gathering together the enchanted warriors from all parts of Spain, will reconquer the Peninsula and restore it to Moslem rule."

"And when shall this happen?" said I.

"Allah alone knows; we had hoped the day of deliverance was at hand; but there reigns at present a vigilant governor in the Alhambra, a staunch old soldier, well known as Governor Manco. While such a warrior holds command of the very outpost, and stands ready to check the first irruption from the mountain, I fear Boabdil and his soldiery must be content to rest upon their arms."

Here the governor raised himself somewhat perpendicularly, adjusted his sword, and twirled up his mustachios.

"To make a long story short, and not to fatigue your excellency, the trooper, having given me this account, dismounted from his steed.

"Tarry here," said he, "and guard my steed while I go and bow the knee to Boabdil." So saying, he strode away among the throng that pressed forward to the throne.

"What's to be done?" thought I, when thus left to myself; "shall I wait here until this infidel returns to whisk me off on his goblin steed, the Lord knows where; or shall I make the most of my time and beat a retreat from this hobgoblin community?" A soldier's mind is soon made up, as your excellency well knows. As to the horse, he belonged to an avowed enemy of the faith and the realm, and was a fair prize according to the rules of war. So hoisting myself from the crupper into the saddle, I turned the reins, struck the Moorish stirrups into the sides of the steed, and put him to make the best of his way out of the passage by which he had entered. As we scoured by the halls where the Moslem horsemen sat in motionless battalions, I thought I heard the clang of armour and a hollow murmur of voices. I gave the steed another taste of the stirrups, and doubled my speed. There was now a sound behind me like a rushing blast; I heard

the clatter of a thousand hoofs; a countless throng overtook me. I was borne along in the press, and hurled forth from the cavern, while thousands of shadowy forms were swept off in every direction by the four winds of heaven.

'In the whirl and confusion of the scene I was thrown senseless to the earth. When I came to myself I was lying on the brow of a hill with the Arabian steed standing beside me; for in falling, my arm had slipped within the bridle, which, I presume, prevented his whisking off to Old Castile.

'Your excellency may easily judge of my surprise on looking round, to behold hedges of aloes and Indian figs and other proofs of a southern climate, and to see a great city below me with towers and palaces, and a grand cathedral.

'I descended the hill cautiously, leading my steed, for I was afraid to mount him again, lest he should play me some slippery trick. As I descended I met with your patrol, who let me into the secret that it was Granada that lay before me; and that I was actually under the walls of the Alhambra, the fortress of the redoubted Governor Manco, the terror of all enchanted Moslems. When I heard this, I determined at once to seek your excellency, to inform you of all that I had seen, and to warn you of the perils that surround and undermine you, that you may take measures in time to guard your fortress, and the kingdom itself, from this intestine army that lurks in the very bowels of the land.'

'And pr'ythee, friend, you who are a veteran campaigner, and have seen so much service,' said the governor, 'how would you advise me to proceed, in order to prevent this evil?'

'It is not for a humble private of the ranks,' said the soldier modestly, 'to pretend to instruct a commander of your excellency's sagacity, but it appears to me that your excellency might cause all the caves and entrances into the mountain to be walled up with solid mason-work,

so that Boabdil and his army might be completely corked up in their subterranean habitation. If the good father, too,' added the soldier, reverently bowing to the friar and devoutly crossing himself, 'would consecrate the barricadoes with his blessing, and put up a few crosses and reliques and images of saints, I think they might withstand all the power of infidel enchantments.'

'They doubtless would be of great avail,' said the friar.

The governor now placed his arm a-kimbo, with his hand resting on the hilt of his toledo, fixed his eye upon the soldier, and gently wagged his head from one side to the other.

'So, friend,' said he, 'then you really suppose I am to be gulled with this cock-and-bull story about enchanted mountains and enchanted Moors? Hark ye, culprit!—not another word. An old soldier you may be, but you'll find you have an older soldier to deal with, and one not easily out-generalled. Ho! guards there! put this fellow in irons.'

The demure handmaid would have put in a word in favour of the prisoner, but the governor silenced her with a look.

As they were pinioning the soldier, one of the guards felt something of bulk in his pocket, and drawing it forth, found a long leathern purse that appeared to be well filled. Holding it by one corner, he turned out the contents upon the table before the governor, and never did freebooter's bag make more gorgeous delivery. Out tumbled rings and jewels, and rosaries of pearls, and sparkling diamond crosses, and a profusion of ancient golden coin, some of which fell jingling to the floor and rolled away to the uttermost parts of the chamber.

For a time the functions of justice were suspended: there was a universal scramble after the glittering fugitives. The governor alone, who was imbued with true Spanish pride, maintained his stately decorum, though his eye be-

trayed a little anxiety until the last coin and jewel was restored to the sack.

The friar was not so calm; his whole face glowed like a furnace, and his eyes twinkled and flashed at sight of the rosaries and crosses.

'Sacrilegious wretch that thou art!' exclaimed he, 'what church or sanctuary hast thou been plundering of these sacred relics?'

'Neither one nor the other, holy father. If they be sacrilegious spoils, they must have been taken in times long past, by the infidel trooper I have mentioned. I was just going to tell his excellency when he interrupted me, that on taking possession of the trooper's horse, I unhooked a leathern sack which hung at the saddle-bow, and which I presume contained the plunder of his campaignings in days of old, when the Moors overran the country.'

'Mighty well; at present you will make up your mind to take up your quarters in a chamber of the vermilion tower, which, though not under a magic spell, will hold you as safe as any cave of your enchanted Moors.'

'Your excellency will do as you think proper,' said the prisoner coolly. 'I shall be thankful to your excellency for any accommodation in the fortress. A soldier who has been in the wars, as your excellency well knows, is not particular about his lodgings: provided I have a snug dungeon and regular rations, I shall manage to make myself comfortable. I would only entreat that, while your excellency is so careful about me, you would have an eye to your fortress, and think on the hint I dropped about stopping up the entrances to the mountain.'

Here ended the scene. The prisoner was conducted to a strong dungeon in the vermilion tower, and the Arabian steed was led to his excellency's stable, and the trooper's sack deposited in his excellency's strong-box. To the latter, it is true, the friar made some demur, questioning whether the sacred relics, which were evidently sacrilegious spoils, should not be placed in custody of the

church; but as the governor was peremptory on the subject, and was absolute lord in the Alhambra, the friar discreetly dropped the discussion, but determined to convey intelligence of the fact to the church dignitaries in Granada.

To explain these prompt and rigid measures on the part of old Governor Manco, it is proper to observe, that about this time the Alpuxarra mountains in the neighbourhood of Granada were terribly infested by a gang of robbers, under the command of a daring chief named Manuel Borasco, who were accustomed to prowl about the country, and even to enter the city in various disguises, to gain intelligence of the departure of convoys of merchandise, or travellers with well-lined purses, whom they took care to way-lay in distant and solitary passes of their road. These repeated and daring outrages had awakened the attention of government, and the commanders of the various posts had received instructions to be on the alert and to take up all suspicious stragglers. Governor Manco was particularly zealous in consequence of the various stigmas that had been cast upon his fortress, and he now doubted not that he had entrapped some formidable desperado of this gang.

In the meantime the story took wind, and became the talk, not merely of the fortress, but of the whole city of Granada. It was said that the noted robber Manuel Borasco, the terror of the Alpuxarras, had fallen into the clutches of old Governor Manco, and been cooped up by him in a dungeon of the vermilion tower; and every one who had been robbed by him flocked to recognize the marauder. The vermilion towers, as is well known, stand apart from the Alhambra, on a sister hill, separated from the main fortress by the ravine down which passes the main avenue. There were no outer walls, but a sentinel patrolled before the tower. The window of the chamber in which the soldier was confined, was strongly grated, and looked upon a small esplanade. Here the

good folks of Granada repaired to gaze at him, as they would at a laughing hyena, grinning through the cage of a menagerie. Nobody, however, recognized him for Manuel Borasco, for that terrible robber was noted for a ferocious physiognomy, and had by no means the good-humoured squint of the prisoner. Visitors came not merely from the city, but from all parts of the country; but nobody knew him, and there began to be doubts in the minds of the common people whether there might not be some truth in his story. That Boabdil and his army were shut up in the mountain, was an old tradition which many of the ancient inhabitants had heard from their fathers. Numbers went up to the mountain of the sun, or rather of St Elena, in search of the cave mentioned by the soldier; and saw and peeped into the deep dark pit, descending no one knows how far, into the mountain, and which remains there to this day—the fabled entrance to the subterranean abode of Boabdil.

By degrees the soldier became popular with the common people. A freebooter of the mountains is by no means the opprobrious character in Spain that a robber is in any other country: on the contrary, he is a kind of chivalrous personage in the eyes of the lower classes. There is always a disposition, also, to cavil at the conduct of those in command; and many began to murmur at the high-handed measures of old Governor Manco, and to look upon the prisoner in the light of a martyr.

The soldier, moreover, was a merry, waggish fellow, that had a joke for every one who came near his window, and a soft speech for every female. He had procured an old guitar also, and would sit by his window and sing ballads and love-ditties, to the delight of the women of the neighbourhood, who would assemble on the esplanade in the evenings and dance boleros to his music. Having trimmed off his rough beard, his sun-burnt face found favour in the eyes of the fair, and the demure handmaid of the governor declared that his squint was perfectly

irresistible. This kind-hearted damsel had from the first evinced a deep sympathy in his fortunes, and having in vain tried to mollify the governor, had set to work privately to mitigate the rigour of his dispensations. Every day she brought the prisoner some crumbs of comfort which had fallen from the governor's table, or been abstracted from his larder, together with, now and then, a consoling bottle of choice Val de Penas, or rich Malaga.

While this petty-treason was going on, in the very centre of the old governor's citadel, a storm of open war was brewing up among his external foes. The circumstances of a bag of gold and jewels having been found upon the person of the supposed robber, had been reported with many exaggerations, in Granada. A question of territorial jurisdiction was immediately started by the governor's inveterate rival, the captain-general. He insisted that the prisoner had been captured without the precincts of the Alhambra, and within the rules of his authority. He demanded his body therefore, and the *spolia opima* taken with him. Due information having been carried likewise by the friar to the grand Inquisitor of the crosses and rosaries, and other replicas contained in the bag, he claimed the culprit as having been guilty of sacrilege, and insisted that his plunder was due to the church, and his body to the next *auto da fé*. The feuds ran high, the governor was furious, and swore, rather than surrender his captive, he would hang him up within the Alhambra, as a spy caught within the purlieus of the fortress.

The captain-general threatened to send a body of soldiers to transfer the prisoner from the vermilion tower to the city. The grand Inquisitor was equally bent upon despatching a number of the familiars of the Holy Office. Word was brought late at night to the governor, of these machinations. 'Let them come,' said he, 'they'll find me beforehand with them; he must rise bright and early who would take in an old soldier.' He accordingly issued

orders to have the prisoner removed at day-break, to the donjon keep within the walls of the Alhambra. 'And d'ye hear, child,' said he to his demure handmaid, 'tap at my door, and wake me before cock-crowing, that I may see to the matter myself.'

The day dawned, the cock crowed, but nobody tapped at the door of the governor. The sun rose high above the mountain-tops, and glittered in at his casement, ere the governor was wakened from his morning dreams by his veteran corporal, who stood before him with terror stamped upon his iron visage.

'He's off! He's gone!' cried the corporal, gasping for breath.

'Who's off—who's gone?'

'The soldier—the robber—the devil for aught I know; his dungeon is empty, but the door locked, no one knows how he has escaped out of it.'

'Who saw him last?'

'Your handmaid, she brought him his supper.'

'Let her be called instantly.'

Here was new matter of confusion. The chamber of the demure damsel was likewise empty, her bed had not been slept in: she had doubtless gone off with the culprit, as she had appeared, for some days past, to have frequent conversations with him.

This was wounding the old governor in a tender part, but he had scarce time to wince at it, when new misfortunes broke upon his view. On going into his cabinet he found his strong-box open, the leather purse of the trooper abstracted, and with it, a couple of corpulent bags of doubloons.

But how, and which way, had the fugitives escaped? An old peasant who lived in a cottage by the road-side, leading up to the Sierra, declared that he had heard the tramp of a powerful steed just before day-break, passing up into the mountains. He had looked out at his casement,

and could just distinguish a horseman, with a female seated before him.

‘Search the stables!’ cried Governor Manco. The stables were searched; all the horses were in their stalls, excepting the Arabian steed. In his place was a stout cudgel tied to the manger, and on it a label bearing these words, ‘A gift to Governor Manco, from an Old Soldier.’

THE CICERONES

Robert Aickman

John Trant entered the Cathedral of Saint Bavon at almost exactly 11:30.

An unexpected week's holiday having come his way, he was spending it in Belgium, because Belgium was near and it was late in the season, and because he had never been there. Trant, who was unmarried (though one day he intended to marry), was travelling alone, but he seldom felt lonely at such times because he believed that his solitude was optional and regarded it rather as freedom. He was 32 and saw himself as quite ordinary, except perhaps in this very matter of travel, which he thought he took more seriously and systematically than most. The hour at which he entered the Cathedral was important, because he had been inconvenienced in other towns by the irritating continental habit of shutting tourist buildings between 12:00 and 2:00, even big churches. In fact, he had been in two minds as to whether to visit the Cathedral at all with so little time in hand. One could not even count upon the full half-hour, because the driving out of visitors usually began well before the moment of actual closure. It was a still morning, very still, but overcast. Men were beginning to wait, one might say, for the year finally to die.

The thing that struck Trant most as he entered the vast building was how silent it seemed to be within; how empty. Other Belgian cathedrals had contained twenty or thirty scattered people praying, or anyway kneeling; priests importantly on the move, followed by acolytes; and, of course, Americans. There had always been dingy bustle, ritual action, and neck-craning. Here there seemed to be no one; other, doubtless, than the people in the tombs. Trant again wondered whether the informed did

not know that it was already too late to go in.

He leant against a column at the west end of the nave as he always did, and read the history of the cathedral in his Blue Guide. He chose this position in order that when he came to the next section to be perused, the architectural summary, he could look about him to the best advantage. He usually found, none the less, that he soon had to move if he were to follow what the guide book had to say, as the architecture of few cathedrals can be apprehended, even in outline, by a newcomer from a single point. So it was now: Trant found that he was losing the thread, and decided he would have to take up the guide book's trail. Before doing so, he looked around him for a moment. The Cathedral seemed still to be quite empty. It was odd, but a very pleasant change.

Trant set out along the south aisle of the nave, holding the guide book like a breviary. 'Carved oak pulpit,' said the guide book, 'with marble figures, all by Laurent Delvaux.' Trant had observed it vaguely from afar, but as, looking up from the book, he began consciously to think about it, he saw something extraordinary. Surely there was a figure in the pulpit, not standing erect, but slumped forward over the preacher's cushion? Trant could see the top of a small, bald head with a deep fringe, almost a halo, of white hair; and, on each side, widespread arms, with floppy hands. Not that it appeared to be a priest: the figure was wearing neither white nor black, but on the contrary, bright colours, several of them. Though considerably unnerved, Trant went forward, passed the next column, in the arcade between the nave and the aisle, and looked again, through the next bay. He saw at once that there was nothing: at least there was only a litter of minor vestments and scripts in coloured bindings.

Trant heard a laugh. He turned. Behind him stood a slender, brown-haired young man in a grey suit.

'Excuse me,' said the young man. 'I saw it myself, so don't be frightened.' He spoke quite clearly, but had

a vague foreign accent.

'It was terrifying,' said Trant. 'Out of this world.'

'Yes. Out of this world, as you say. Did you notice the hair?'

'I did indeed.' The young man had picked on the very detail which had perturbed Trant the most. 'What did you make of it?'

'Holy, holy, holy,' said the young man in his foreign accent; then smiled and sauntered off westwards. Trant was *almost* sure that this was what he had said. The hair of the illusory figure in the pulpit had, at the time, reminded Trant of the way in which nimbuses are shown in certain old paintings; with wide bars or strips of light linking an outer misty ring with the sacred head. The figure's white hair had seemed to project in just such spikes.

Trant pulled himself together and reached the south transept, hung high with hatchments. He sought out 'Christ among the Doctors', 'The masterpiece of Frans Pourbus the Elder', the guide book remarked, and set himself to identifying the famous people said to be depicted in it, including the Duke of Alva, Vigilius ab Ayatta, and even the Emperor Charles V himself.

In the adjoining chapel, 'The Martyrdom of St Barbara' by De Crayer proved to be covered with a cloth, another irritating continental habit, as Trant had previously discovered. As there seemed to be no one about, Trant lifted a corner of the cloth, which was brown and dusty, like so many things in Belgian cathedrals, and peered beneath. It was difficult to make out very much, especially as the light was so poor.

'Let me help,' said a transatlantic voice at Trant's back. 'Let me take it right off, and then you'll see something, believe me.'

Again it was a young man, but this time a red-haired cheerful looking youth in a green windcheater.

The youth not only removed the cloth, but turned on an electric light.

'Thank you,' said Trant.

'Now have a good look.'

Trant looked. It was an extremely horrible scene.

'Oh, boy.'

Trant had no desire to look any longer. 'Thank you all the same,' he said, apologizing for his repulsion.

'What a circus those old saints were,' commented the transatlantic youth, as he replaced the worn cloth.

'I suppose they received their reward in heaven,' suggested Trant.

'You bet they did,' said the youth, with a fervour that Trant couldn't quite fathom. He turned off the light. 'Be seeing you.'

'I expect so,' said Trant smiling.

The youth said no more, but put his hands in his pockets, and departed whistling towards the south door. Trant himself would not have cared to whistle so loudly in a foreign church.

As all the world knows, the most important work of art in the Cathedral of St Bavon is the 'Adoration' by the mysterious van Eyck or van Eycks, singular or plural. Nowadays the picture is hung in a small, curtained-off chapel leading from the south choir ambulatory; and most strangers must pay to see it. When Trant reached the chapel, he saw the notice at the door, but, hearing nothing, as elsewhere, supposed the place to be empty. Resenting mildly the demand for a fee, as Protestants do, he took the initiative and gently lifted the dark red curtain.

The chapel, though still silent, was not empty at all. On the contrary, it was so full that Trant could have gone no further inside, even had he dared.

There were two kinds of people in the chapel. In front were several rows of men in black. They knelt shoulder to shoulder, heads dropped, hip-bone against hip-bone, in what Trant took to be silent worship. Behind them, packed in even more tightly, was a group, even a small crowd, of funny old Belgian women, fat, ugly, sexless, and bossy,

such as Trant had often seen in other places, both devotional and secular. The old women were not kneeling, but sitting. All the same, they seemed eerily rapt. Strangest of all was their motionless silence. Trant had seen such groups everywhere in Belgium, but never, never silent, very far from it. Not a single one of this present group seemed even to be aware that he was there: something equally unusual with a people so given to curiosity.

And in this odd setting not the least strange thing was the famous picture itself, with its enigmatic monsters, sibyls, and walking allegories, and its curiously bright, other-world colours: a totality doubtless interpretable in terms of Freud, but, all the same, as dense as an oriental carpet, and older than Adam and Eve, who stand beside. Trant found the picture all too cognate to the disconcerting devotees.

He let fall the curtain and went on his way, distinctly upset.

Two chapels further round, he came upon the 'Virgin Glorified' by Liemakere. Here a choir-boy in a red cassock was polishing the crucifix on the altar. Already, he had thin black hair and a grey, watchful face.

'Onze lieve Vrouw,' said the choir-boy, explaining the picture to Trant.

'Yes,' said Trant. 'Thank you.'

It occurred to him that polishing was odd work for a choir-boy. Perhaps this was not a choir-boy at all, but some other kind of young servitor. The idea of being shortly ejected from the building returned to Trant's mind. He looked at his watch. It had stopped. It still showed 11:28.

Trant shook the watch against his ear, but there were no recovering ticks. He saw that the polishing boy (he was at work on the pierced feet) wore a watch also, on a narrow black strap. Trant gesticulated again. The boy shook his head more violently. Trant could not decide

whether the boy's own watch was broken, or whether, conceivably, he thought that Trant was trying to take it from him. Then, all in seconds, it struck Trant that, whatever else there was about the boy he certainly did not appear alarmed. Far from it. He seemed as aloof as if he were already a priest, and to be refusing to tell Trant the time on principle; almost implying, as priests presume to do, that he was refusing for the other's good. Trant departed from the chapel containing Liemakere's masterpiece rather quickly.

How much time had he left?

In the next chapel was Rubens's vast altarpiece of St Bavon distributing all his goods among the poor.

In the next was the terrifying 'Martyrdom of Saint Livinus' by Seghers.

After one more chapel, Trant had reached the junction of the north transept and the choir. The choir was surrounded by a heavy and impenetrable screen of black marble, like a cage for the imperial lions. The guide book recommended the four tombs of past bishops which were said to be inside; but Trant, peering through the stone bars, could hardly see even outlines. He shifted from end to end of the choir steps seeking a viewpoint where the light might be better. It was useless. In the end, he tried the handle of the choir gate. The gate had given every appearance of being locked, but in fact it opened at once when Trant made the attempt. He tiptoed into the dark enclosure and thought he had better shut the gate behind him. He was not sure that he was going to see very much of the four tombs even now; but there they were, huge boxes flanking the high altar, like dens for the lions.

He stood at the steps of the altar itself, leaning across the marble rails, the final barricade, trying to read one of the Latin inscriptions. In such an exercise Trant made it a matter of principle not lightly to admit defeat. He craned his neck and screwed up his eyes until he was half-

dazed; capturing the antique words one at a time, and trying to construe them. The matter of the cathedral shutting withdrew temporarily to the back of his mind. Then something horrible seemed to happen; or rather two things, one after the other. Trant thought, first, that the stone panel he was staring at so hard, seemed somehow to move; and then that a hand had appeared round one upper corner of it. It seemed to Trant a curiously small hand.

Trant decided, almost calmly, to see it out. There must obviously be an explanation, and anything like flight would make him look ridiculous, as well as leaving the mystery unsolved. An explanation there was; the stone opened further, and from within emerged a small, fair-haired child.

'Hullo,' said the child, looking at Trant across the black marble barrier and smiling.

'Hullo,' said Trant. 'You speak very good English.'

'*I am* English,' said the child. It was wearing a dark brown garment open at the neck, and dark brown trousers, but Trant could not quite decide whether it was a boy or a girl. From the escapade a boy seemed likelier, but there was something about the child which was more like a girl, Trant thought.

'Should you have been in there?'

'I always go in.'

'Aren't you afraid?'

'No one could be afraid of Bishop Triest. He gave us those candlesticks.' The child pointed to four copper objects; which seemed to Trant to offer no particular confirmation of the child's logic.

'Would you like to go in?' enquired the child politely.

'No, thank you,' said Trant.

'Then I'll just shut up.' The child heaved the big stone slab into place. It was a feat of strength all the more remarkable in that Trant noticed that the child seemed to limp.

'Do you live here?' asked Trant.

'Yes,' said the child, and, child-like, said no more.

It limped forward, climbed the altar rail, and stood beside Trant, looking up at him. Trant found it difficult to assess how old it was.

'Would you like to see one of the other bishops?'

'No thank you,' said Trant.

'I think you ought to see a bishop,' said the child quite gravely.

'I'd rather not,' said Trant smiling.

'There may not be another chance.'

'I expect not,' said Trant, still smiling. He felt it was best to converse with the child at its own level, and make no attempt at adult standards of flat questioning and conventionalized reference.

'Then I'll take you to the crypt,' said the child.

The crypt was the concluding item in the guide book. Entered from just by the north-western corner of the choir, it was, like the 'Adoration', a speciality, involving payment. Trant had rather assumed that he would not get round to it.

'Shall I have time?' he asked, looking instinctively at his stopped watch, still showing 11:28.

'Yes,' said the child, as before.

The child limped ahead, opened the choir-gate, and held it for Trant, his inscriptions unread, to pass through. The child closed the gate, and led the way to the crypt entry, looking over its shoulder to see that Trant was following. In the rather better light outside the choir. Trant saw that its hair was a wonderful mass of silky gold; its face almost white, with the promise of fine bones; its lips unusually full and red.

'This is called the crossing,' said the child informatively. Trant knew that the term was sometimes applied to the intersection of nave and transepts.

'Or the narthex, I believe,' he said, plunging in order to show who was the grown-up.

The child, not unnaturally, looked merely puzzled.

There was still no one else visible in the cathedral.

They began to descend the crypt stairs, the child holding on to the iron handrail, because of its infirmity. There was a table at the top, obviously for the collection of the fee, but deserted. Trant did not feel called upon to comment.

In the crypt, slightly to his surprise, many of the lights were on. Probably the custodian had forgotten to turn them off when he or she had hurried forth to eat.

The guide book described the crypt as 'large', but it was much larger than Trant had expected. The stairs entered it at one corner, and columns seemed to stretch away like trees into the distance. They were built in stones of different colours, maroon, purple, green, grey, gold; and they often bore remains of painting as well, which also spread over areas of the vaulted stone roof and weighty walls. In the soft patchy light, the place was mysterious and beautiful; and all the more so because the whole area could not be seen simultaneously. With the tide of centuries the stone-paved floor had become rolling and uneven, but agreeably so. There were occasional showcases and objects on pedestals, and there was a gentle perfume of incense. As Trant entered, all was silent. He even felt for a moment that there was something queer about the silence; that only sounds of another realm moved in it, and that the noises of this world, of his own arrival for example, were in a different dimension and irrelevant. He stood, a little awed, and listened for a moment to the nothingness.

The child stood too, or rather rested against a pillar. It was smiling again, though very slightly. Perhaps it smiled like this all the time, as if always happy.

Trant thought more than ever that it might be a girl. By this time it was rather absurd not to be sure, but by this time it was more than before difficult to ask.

'Bishop Triest's clothes,' said the child, pointing. They

were heavy vestments, hanging, enormously embroidered, in a glass cabinet.

'Saint Livinus's ornament,' said the child, and crossed itself. Trant did not know quite what to make of the ornament.

'Animals,' said the child. It was an early book of natural history, written by a monk, and even the opened page showed some very strange ones.

The child was now beginning positively to dart about in its eagerness, pointing out item after item.

'Shrine of Saint Marcarius,' said the child, not crossing itself, presumably because the relic was absent.

'Abbot Hughenois's clothes.' They were vestments again, and very much like Triest's vestments, Trant thought.

'What's that?' asked Trant, taking the initiative and pointing. Right on the other side of the crypt, as it seemed, and now visible to Trant for the first time through the forest of soft coloured columns, was something which appeared to be winking and gleaming with light.

'That's at the end,' replied the child. 'You'll be there soon.'

Soon indeed, at this hour, thought Trant: if in fact we're not thrown out first.

'Via Dolorosa,' said the child, pointing to a picture. It was a gruesome scene, painted very realistically, as if the artist had been a bystander at the time; and it was followed by another which was even more gruesome and at least equally realistic.

'Calvary,' explained the child.

They rounded a corner with the stone wall on the left, the forest of columns on the right. The two parts of a diptych came into view, of which Trant had before seen only the discoloured reverse.

'The blessed and the lost,' said the child, indicating, superfluously, which was which.

Trant thought that the pictures and frescoes were becoming more and more morbid, but supposed that this

feeling was probably the result of their cumulative impact. In any case, there could not be much more.

But there were still many things to be seen. In due course they came to a group of pictures hanging together.

'The sacrifice of three blessed martyrs,' said the child. Each of the martyrs had died in a different way: by roasting on a very elaborate gridiron; by disembowelling; and by some process involving a huge wheel. The paintings, unlike some of the others, were extraordinarily well preserved. The third of the martyrs was a young woman. She had been martyred naked and was of great and still living beauty. Next to her hung a further small picture, showing a saint carrying his own skin. Among the columns to the right, was an enormous black cross. At a little distance, the impaled figure looked lifelike in the extreme.

The child was still skipping in front, making so light of its disability that Trant could not but be touched. They turned another corner. At the end of the ambulatory ahead was the gleaming, flashing object that Trant had noticed from the other side of the crypt. The child almost ran on, ignoring the intervening sights, and stood by the object, waiting for Trant to catch up. The child's head was sunk, but Trant could see that it was looking at him from under its fair, silky eyelashes.

This time the child said nothing, and Trant could only stare.

The object was a very elaborate, jewelled reliquary of the renaissance. It was presumably the jewels which had seemed to give off the flashing lights, because Trant could see no lights now. At the centre of the reliquary was a transparent vertical tube or cylinder. It was only about an inch high, and probably made of crystal. Just visible inside it was a short black thread, almost like the mercury in a minute thermometer; and at the bottom of the tube was, Trant noticed, a marked discolouration.

The child was still standing in the same odd position; now glancing sideways at Trant, now glancing away. It

was perhaps smiling a little more broadly, but its head was sunk so low that Trant could not really see. Its whole posture and behaviour suggested that there was something about the reliquary which Trant should be able to see for himself. It was almost as if the child were timing him, to see how long he took.

Time, thought Trant, yet again; and now with a start. The reliquary was so fascinating that he had managed somehow almost to forget about time. He looked away and along the final ambulatory, which ran to the foot of the staircase by which he had descended. While he had been examining the reliquary, someone else had appeared in the crypt. A man stood in the centre of the passage, a short distance from Trant. Or not exactly a man: it was, Trant realised, the acolyte in the red cassock, the boy who had been polishing the brass feet. Trant had no doubt that he had come to hurry him out.

Trant bustled off, full of unreasonable guilt, without even properly thanking his child guide. But when he reached the boy in the cassock, the boy silently stretched out his arms to their full length and seemed, on the contrary, to bar his passage.

It was rather absurd; and especially as one could so readily turn right and weave a way out through the Gothic columns.

Trant, in fact, turned his head in that direction, simply upon instinct. But, in the bay to his right, stood the youth from across the Atlantic in the green windcheater. He had the strangest of expression (unlike the boy in the cassock, who seemed the same dull peasant as before); and as soon as Trant caught his eye, he too raised his arms their full extent, as the boy had done.

There was still one more free bay. Trant retreated a step or two, but then saw among the shadows within (which seemed to be deepening) the man in the grey suit with the vague foreign accent. His arms were going up even as Trant sighted him, but when their eyes met (though

Trant could not see his face very well) he did something the others had not done. He laughed.

And in the entrance to the other ambulatory, through which Trant had just come and down which the child had almost run, bravely casting aside its affliction, stood that same child, now gazing upwards again, and indeed looking quite radiant, as it spread its arms almost as a bird taking flight.

Trant heard the great clock of the cathedral strike twelve. In the crypt, the tone of the bell was lost: there was little more to be distinguished than twelve great thuds, almost as if cannon were being discharged. The twelve strokes of the hour took a surprisingly long time to complete.

In the meantime, and just beside the reliquary, a small door had opened, in the very angle of the crypt. Above it was a small but exquisite and well preserved alabaster keystone showing a soul being dragged away on a hook by a demon. Trant had hardly noticed the door before, as people commonly overlook the working details of a place which is on show, the same details that those who work the place look to first.

In the door, quite filling it, was the man Trant believed himself to have seen in the pulpit soon after he had first entered the great building. The man looked bigger now, but there were the same bald head, the same resigned hands, the same multicoloured garments. It was undoubtedly the very person, but in some way enlarged or magnified; and the curious fringe of hair seemed more luminous than ever.

'You must leave now,' said the man kindly but firmly. 'Follow me.'

The four figures encircling Trant began to shut in on him until their extended finger-tips were almost touching.

His questions went quite unanswered, his protests quite unheard; especially after everyone started singing.

OLD MRS JONES

Mrs Riddell

I

There could not have been found in his parish, which was a large one, a prouder or happier man than Richard Tippens, on the day when he took possession of the house which had been tenanted by Dr Jones.

Never a better fellow drew breath than Mr Richard Tippens. A good son, a loving husband, a fond father, his worst enemy could only say of him he had two faults—one, a tendency to be extra generous; the other, a perhaps undue fondness for an extra glass. But, earning money by the pocketful, as Dick did in those days, when there were fewer cabs and buses than at present, no tramcars, no Metropolitan or daylight route railway, to be free-handed seemed a virtue rather than a sin; whilst a man who had to be out in all weathers, and the period of whose meals was as uncertain as the climate, could scarcely be blamed for yielding to the solicitations of sporting or commercial-gent fares, and his own inclination, in the matter of little 'gos' of rum and half-quarterns of gin, and whisky cold without, or with 'just a drop of hot water and one lump of sugar, my dear, as my fingers is stiff with cold.'

Mr Tippens was a cheery fellow, with a jolly, honest, laughing face, merciful to the cattle he drove, proud of his newly-painted cab, of his silver-plated harness, of a fresh horse he had just bought, and—oh, far, far prouder of all—of having got the old house which Dr Jones lived in, for so many a long and wicked year, for a mere song in the way of rent. It was precisely the sort of place he had been looking out for, he could scarcely remember

how long; an old-fashioned house—not a grand old-fashioned house altogether above their position, but a rambling, ramshackle building, with a wide staircase, and lots of cupboards, and plenty of rooms they could let off to great advantage, and large cellars, and a paved yard at the back, where were also stables, and coach-house, and lofts, and washhouse, and brew-house, and ever so many other odd little places, telling unconsciously of the time when people, and things, and ways were different from what they are now; when wood enough for the whole winter had to be laid in at once, and bread was baked at home, and flitches of bacon were laid in the racks, and such modern innovations as tradesmen calling every day for orders, ladies only spending about thirty minutes a week in their kitchens, and no mistress's store-room, were matters still undreamt of.

'It is a splendid house,' Mr Richard Tippens joyfully exclaimed, when, opening the door with his own key, he walked into the premises with the old creature who was to do the repairs for him.

'Fit for any gentleman,' capped the person in question, the accuracy of whose ideas on any social subject of that sort was indeed open to doubt, for he had only one definite notion on earth, and that was beer. His point of view was the nearest tap, and any road which led to the desired haven seemed to him filled with better company than the Row in the season.

He had been in a yard where Dick Tippens, then owning no horses of his own, was fain to work under a cab proprietor.

'I have known poor old Mickey,' Dick was wont to say, 'for a matter of thirty years, on and off, you know, and ever since I was as high as that,' and the great burly fellow would indicate a height a child of five might have scoffed at. But Dick did not add how many a sixpence, and shilling, and half-crown, and good warm dinner had found their way to old Mickey since he met with the

accident (when he was drunk) which made him for ever after a dependant on the charity of the ratepayers and the liberality of those who could remember him when he was earning from 'thirty-three to forty bob a week, besides gettings.' That Mickey, while in receipt of this princely income, might have put aside a trifle to help him over that rainy day, induced by 'the cussedest brute that ever lashed out without a sign of warning,' was an idea which never seemed to occur either to the various relieving officers he was under or to the many friends who 'stood treat.'

Neither was any weight attached to the horse's view of the question. How Michael himself would have liked his own toilet performed with the aid of a pitchfork, which was the implement he had taken up, apparently under the impression it was a curry-comb, nobody inquired. All that his own public considered was that Mickey, once the weekly recipient of 'thirty-three to forty bob and gettings,' which latter item probably amounted to as much more, had to go on the parish and feel thankful for half-crowns from the Board, and such odd jobs as Heaven, more merciful than the abhorred Board, put in his way.

For the rest he was a drunken, dissolute, lying, discontented carneying old vagabond, who thrived on the kindness and folly of men like Dick Tippens, who likewise was not laying by a farthing but spending such of his superfluous cash as did not go in the best of good eating and drinking and smoking in the purchase of useless articles of various kinds, in fine household linen and damask, in a large stock of clothes for himself, which he could not possibly wear out before they grew old-fashioned, in shawls and dresses for his wife, each and all destined eventually to find their way to the pawnbroker as surely and infallibly as the sparks fly upwards.

For apparently a mere trifle, 'just a bite of food, or a half-pint of beer, or an old pair of cast-off boots, or a

coat you don't care to be seen about in any longer yourself, even in the worst of weather,' thus, 'poor old Mickey'; 'or just whatever you are pleased to give me, or nothing at all, Mr Tippens, I'll make the place clean and sweet for you. There is little here I can't do, except maybe the roof and a bit of brick-laying, that needs standing on a high ladder, or the pipes mending, or the gutter seeing to; but leave that all to me, plenty will be glad to earn a shilling or two, and I know where to go to look for them; don't you trouble yourself at all. Which had we best make a start with, the house, d'ye think, or the yard?'

Mr Tippens thought the house. Once he was on the premises he could see to a bit of the loft and stables himself, and give Mike a helping hand; and his wife was all agog to get in, and put the place to rights while the fine weather lasted; and he had some fresh lodgers now, only waiting till he could take them in; and the children, poor things, were wild at the thought of the yard and the out-buildings.

'And fine children they are too,' answered the worthy Michael; 'but there, what would hinder them? You're not an ill-favoured man yourself, Mr Tippens, and I mind the time when all the girls were setting their caps at you, and the like of your wife for beauty never stepped. The very sight of her seems to do my old eyes good, like the sunshine on a bright May morning. She always minds me somehow of primroses and violets and bluebells, and the scent of the wallflowers that used to grow along on the low wall of my father's garden down in Surrey,' and as he uttered these poetical similes, Michael's watery eyes wistfully followed the movements of Mr Tippens' right hand while it fumbled in his pocket for a shilling, to bestow on the 'poor old fellow, who had neither chick nor child, nor one belonging to him.'

The expenditure of whitewash in that house was something awful; Westminster Abbey or the Tower of London

could scarcely have required a larger outlay in whiting.

'You have no idea,' said Mike, 'of the quantity of wash them ceilings needs'—which, indeed, Mr Tippens had not—floors, walls, and Mickey himself also received coat after coat; and the dust, according to the ex-helper's account, was so awful he was forced to keep a pot of beer constantly beside him, in one of the cupboards, to take a sip of at frequent intervals to prevent his choking.

At last, however, even Mike felt it would be dangerous any longer to defer announcing the completion of the repairs. He was brought to this state of mind by a visit from Mrs Tippens, who, after declaring in tones not much like the birds in spring that she could have done the work herself in a quarter of the time, said, 'Done or undone, she meant to have the "cleaning" begun on the following Monday,' when she requested the favour of Mike's room instead of his company.

She saw clearly enough that individual was in a fuddled state, and whether the intoxication was produced by beer, or gin, or whitewash, or the lead in the paint, did not signify to her; even the praise of her children only elicited the answer that they were 'well enough,' and a more elaborate tribute to her own charms failed to soften the asperity with which she told him to 'hold his tongue.'

'I expect that Mickey has taken you in nicely, Dick,' she said to her husband that night.

'Oh, it hasn't cost me so much,' answered Mr Tippens easily; 'there was a whole lot of things to do.'

As indeed he found when the rainy months and the snow came, and the water poured from the spouts, all of which leaked, and the wet soaked through the broken tiles that had never been replaced; and it was found necessary to open all the drains.

Long before winter arrived, however, Mrs Tippens discovered that not a lock or bolt in the house worked properly; that the paint had only been smeared on the wood-work; that the whole of the repairs, in fact, had con-

sisted in further dilapidation of the coats of Mr Mike's stomach; and that almost all the money paid by her husband for 'labour,' 'material,' 'extra help,' 'hire of ladders,' 'use of pulley,' and so forth, had been spent over the counter of the 'Guy Faux' tavern, situated round a near and convenient corner.

Meeting Mike one day, her just indignation found utterance, and, with feminine frankness, she reproached him for having deceived a man who had been so kind to him as her husband. Mrs Tippens was in no sense of the word a shrew, but she could upon occasion speak out her mind, and on this occasion she did speak it very plainly.

Mike never attempted to deny the charge, he only tried to turn it into a victory by a strategic movement likely to divert her attention.

'What was the use,' asked the hoary sinner, 'of spending good money fitting a house up like a palace I knew you would never be able to live in?'

'What would hinder us living in it?' retorted Mrs Tippens, more in the way of comment than inquiry.

'What would hinder you?—Why old Mrs Jones, to be sure; she'll never let anybody live in the house till her bones are dug up out of the hole where her husband buried her.'

'Oh, don't talk to me of your Mrs Joneses!' exclaimed Mrs Tippens, to whom the name was evidently not new. 'At any rate, I never did any harm to the woman—never saw her, to my knowledge, so it's not likely she would come troubling me.'

'She troubles everybody that tries to live in the house you're so set up with. Why, the last people did not stop a fortnight. It's well known she walks the place over, from the second floor down; and, if you take my advice, you won't go into the back-cellar alone after night.'

II

It was Sunday evening. Mr Tippens sat on one side of the fire and his wife on the other. They had partaken of tea, and it was not yet quite time for supper; the children were abed, three of them in a large room at the end of the passage Dr Jones had used as a surgery, while the baby was, for a wonder, fast asleep in its cradle, which stood in a dark corner behind Mrs Tippens' chair. The horses had long been fed and littered down. Mr Tippens always took a look at them last thing, but last thing would not be yet for an hour or more. The house was as quiet as the grave, and through the smoke caused by his pipe Richard Tippens, with a delightful sense of well-being, and doing, and feeling, dreamily regarded his wife, who was certainly an extremely pretty woman, possessing further the reputation of being an extraordinarily good manager; neat in her own person, she always kept her children clean and tidy and well dressed; her rooms were regularly swept and scrubbed, and hearthstoned and blacklead; she mended her husband's clothes, and sewed on his buttons, and with the help of a woman who came in to 'chair,' as it is generally called, did the family washing and the family ironing; she was a very fair cook, not in the least lazy—quite the contrary, indeed—and yet, if I may venture to say so, in the teeth of public opinion, which always favours women of her type, I do not think she was a good manager, for she spent up to the hilt of her income, whatever that might be. She was always considering how to increase her 'gettings,' but she never gave a thought as to how she might save them.

Her husband gave her a liberal allowance, and brought home from outlying regions, where he saw such articles marked up cheap, fowls, fish, necks of mutton, vegetables, and other welcome helps to house-keeping. She had a house

full of regularly paying lodgers, who found their own latch-keys, and required no attendance. She took in needle-work, at which, as she got it by favour, she was able to make a considerable amount of money—and yet, if she had told the truth to her own heart, she would have said, ‘We are not one bit better off than we were when Dick only gave me a pound certain every week, and paid the rent.’

It is a pity someone, thoroughly up in financial questions, does not inform us why uncertain incomes lead almost invariably to extravagant living.

Your true economist, your excellent manager, your incomparable financier, is a labourer at a given weekly wage, a clerk on starvation salary, the lady left with the poorest of limited incomes. The moment ‘gettings,’ in any shape, enter into the question economy retires, worsted, from the contest. ‘You have got so much to-day, you may get so much more to-morrow,’ that is the reasoning. Now, why cannot the ‘gettings’ be put aside? Why cannot they be left like an egg in the nest for more to be laid? We know, of course, they never are; but why is it?

Among my own somewhat varied acquaintances, I number, at this moment of writing, two persons—one, a lady whose income, all told, does not reach a hundred a year; on this amount she pays the rent of her rooms, she lives, she dresses; she is not young, and her health requires some few luxuries; yet she is never in debt, and she has always a trifle to spare for those who may be sick or sorry. The other is a youth who I do not think has yet counted eighteen summers; his health is perfect, his rank does not necessitate other than the most moderate expenditure for a bed; his hat covers his family; when he visits, his toilet is easily and perfectly made with a clean collar and a fancy tie; his weekly income has been from thirty to five-and-thirty shillings a week and ‘gettings’; and yet, lately, when he had been four days out of work, with the certainty of getting into work again on the next day but

one, he had to pawn his watch!

Most certainly political economists of the age now coming towards us will find few more difficult questions to deal with than this of 'gettings.' Were an angel to descend from Heaven to-night and tell Mrs Tippens what I know, that 'gettings' had been the curse of herself, her husband, and her children, she would not believe him; so it would be worse than folly for me to speak—even if not cruel impertinence—now the inevitable end has come: the parish; the philanthropic society, the ever-decreasing bounty for which she is able to make interest; such casual help as she can get, and such work as she is able to obtain.

But no one that evening, looking at her and her husband, as they sat beside the fire, at the comfortable, well-furnished room, the bright blaze, the clean-swept hearth, could possibly have thought evil days were looming in the distance for both husband and wife. He, the picture of health and strength; she, a slight and still apparently quite young woman, with a refined style of beauty, and a cast of features altogether unusual in her rank. When her voice was not upraised and her temper tried, both of which had been the case during her encounter with that arch-hypocrite Mike, her mode of speaking accorded with the pure and delicate lines of her countenance. In truth, she had been well brought up, and from her youth knew how, with propriety, to address ladies—*real* ladies, as she was sometimes almost too careful to add; and since her marriage she had kept herself to herself; and in her own home, her children, her relations, and her husband, found all the interest and society she required.

'Dick,' she said, after they had sat in silence for some little time.

'I'm here, Luce,' he answered; 'what is it, my girl?'

'You never told me this house was haunted.'

'I told you people said it was haunted,' he answered, 'and you laughed at the idea; because, as you wisely re-

marked, "when once people are buried they've done with this world, surely."'

'But that's just what we don't know—whether old Mrs Jones was ever buried or not.'

'We don't know whether she is dead or not, for that matter.'

'Then if she's not dead, where can she be?'

'And if Dr Jones isn't dead, where can he be?' retorted Mr Tippens.

'There's dreadful things said about this house, Dick.'

'Well, you just turn a deaf ear to them, and they won't break your night's rest. What's Dr and Mrs Jones to us? He was a bad man, we know; and she, if all accounts may be trusted, was a bit of a shrew, and held a tight grip on the money, which he married her for. He did not take her for her good looks, I'm sure; for a plainer, more ordinary woman you couldn't have met in a day's walk in London. She was more like a witch than anything else—a little bit of a woman, with eyes like black beads, and a face the colour of mahogany; but there—I've described her before, Luce, and I think we might find something pleasanter to talk about now.'

'But they say, Dick—they do, indeed—she walks the house, and—'

'Pack of rubbish,' interrupted Mr Tippens warmly; 'who says it—at least, who says it to you?'

'Why, mostly everybody—the baker, and the bootmaker down the street, and Mike—'

'She didn't hinder *him* staying in the house, at any rate,' commented Dick.

'Well, Mr Mowder lived here, you know.'

'And he was turned out because he wouldn't pay a farthing of rent.'

'He says,' persisted Mrs Tippens resolutely, 'there was always like a cold air in the passage.'

'You can't expect the hall to feel exactly sultry with those great underground kitchens and cellars. I've a mind

to put a few spikes in the door, and so shut the whole of those caverns off the rest of the house.'

'But then, Dick, dear, what should we and our lodgers do about coals?'

'Aye, there you go,' observed Dick. 'Every woman's alike; the moment a man makes a suggestion, she's sure to raise some difficulty. Then I won't nail up the door; will that meet your views, Mrs Tippens?'

'Now, Dick, don't let us quarrel,' entreated his better half; 'there was enough of quarrelling here, if all accounts be true, in the Joneses' time, without our beginning the same game, and—'

He did not let her finish the sentence, he took his pipe out of his mouth, and drew his chair nearer to where she sat, and put his arm round her waist, and drew her head down on his shoulder, and stroked her hair tenderly, and said: 'No fear of that, old girl—ghosts or no ghosts; Mrs Jones or Mrs Anybody else, we'll not take to quarrelling. Only, you see, I don't want you to be listening to foolish stories and the envious talk of people who, maybe, think we're getting on a bit too fast in the world. The house suits me and my business well, and I can't afford to have you set against it, and, likely as not, wanting to leave, and me bound for the rent for three years. Mind that, my lass,' and he gave her a kiss so loud and hearty, neither of them heard the opening of the front door till the sound of several voices caused Mr Tippens to exclaim:

'What noise is that, Luce?'

'The Pendells coming in,' she answered; 'they've her brother and sister with them up from the country.'

'It's about getting on for supper time, then, isn't it, Luce?' asked Mr Tippens tentatively. He was always ready for his meals on a Sunday, perhaps because he did not take out his cab and had nothing to do.

'Yes, I'll bring it in now,' answered his wife; and as she spoke she passed into a lean-to, opening off the sitting-

room, which she had metamorphosed into a tiny kitchen, perhaps to avoid the dark loneliness of those underground regions Mr Tippens well described as caverns.

She had provided a nice little meal, and she looked pretty and graceful as she flitted backwards and forwards, fetching one dish and then another.

'Why, girl, this is a supper fit for the Lord Mayor,' said Mr Tippens, looking approvingly at the contents of the table; 'I don't think the Queen herself—'

What he was going to say concerning Victoria by the Grace of God will never now be known, for when he arrived at this point in his sentence there echoed through the silent house a shriek, which brought both husband and wife to their feet, followed by a thud, as of something heavy falling to the ground.

'Lord bless and save us!' exclaimed Mr Tippens, and seizing a light he rushed out into the passage, followed by his wife.

It was a strangely built house; there were only six steps to the first landing, where was a cupboard in the wall which Mrs Pendell used as a sort of pantry; half-way down the landing there were three steps more, and then the flight that led direct to the rooms where the Pendells lived.

As Dick Tippens and his wife ran up the half-dozen steps leading from the hall, a posse of people came hurrying pell-mell from the upper part of the house. 'What is it? What has happened? Is it thieves? Is the house on fire?' No, the house was not on fire, neither had thieves set themselves at the unprofitable task of effecting an entry; it was only that on the landing Mrs Pendell lay in the deadest faint woman ever fell into, a large dish she had evidently just taken out of the cupboard smashed to atoms beside her, and the remnants of the joint the family had operated upon in the middle of the day a few steps down, where it had rolled when she dropped the dish.

Everything possible and impossible the house contained

was brought to revive Mrs Pendell; everybody was talking at once, and each individual had some pet theory to account for the phenomenon.

'I told her she was a-overdoing it,' said her husband, a slow, florid, phlegmatic, pig-headed sort of man. 'Didn't I, Bill? Didn't I say to her just on this side of Whitechapel Church, "You've been a-overdoing it, Mary, you'll have a turn of them spasms to-morrow"?''

Meantime, the subject of these remarks had been carried into the inner chamber and laid on her bed, where every recognised experimental and favourite personal expedient was tried in order to restore her to consciousness; she was 'poor deared,' her dress was unfastened and her stays loosened, smelling salts of every degree of strength were held to her nostrils, burnt feathers thrust almost up her nose, her hands slapped, cold water dabbed on her forehead, an attempt made to get some brandy down her throat, with various other ingenious efforts at torture, which almost drove Mrs Tippens, who was in the main a very sensible woman, distracted.

'If you'd only leave her to me and Susie,' she said; 'there's not a breath of air in the room, with so many standing about the bed and the doorway. She'll be right enough after a little, if you'll only not crowd her, and let me open the windows.'

'She's right,' observed Mr Pendell, from the doorway. 'Come along, all of you, Mrs Tippens knows what's what.'

Mrs Pendell, however, was so long in justifying this flattering eulogy in Mrs Tippens' favour, that Susie, the sister, who had come up to see her, was just asking if it would not be better to send Bob for the nearest doctor, when Mrs Tippens, raising her hand to enforce silence, said:

'Sh—sh—she's coming to now.'

There was a pause, a pin might have been heard drop, so silent and eager and expectant were the two watchers;

then Mrs Pendell, recovering, opened her eyes a very little, and Mrs Tippens, holding her left hand, and softly rubbing it, said:

'Don't be frightened, dear, it's only me.'

'What is it? Where am I?' murmured Mrs Pendell, adding suddenly, with a gesture of the extremest terror, 'Oh! I remember. Keep her away from me, Mrs Tippens! Mrs Tippens, won't you keep her away—that dreadful woman, you know?'

'She's a bit light-headed,' said her sister; 'I'm sure Bob had better go for the doctor.'

'I don't think there's any need,' answered Mrs Tippens, quietly enough, though her very heart seemed to stand still at the words. 'There's nobody shall come near you, dear, but Susie and me. Don't be looking about the room that way—indeed, there's no one here but your sister and myself.'

'She has long grey hair streaming over her shoulders. Oh, the wickedest face I ever did see! I know her well, don't you, Mrs Tippens?'

'Yes, yes, dear; but never mind her now; keep yourself quiet.'

'She must be the smallest woman in the world,' this after a moment's silence; 'when I turned from the cupboard I felt like a rush of cold air, and there she stood on the top step but one.'

'I think she *would* be the better for some sort of quieting draught,' remarked Mrs Tippens, *sotto voce* to Susan Hay—and it is no disparagement of a courageous woman's courage to say, after Susie left the room she looked fearfully around, while Mrs Pendell rambled on about the dreadful sight which had struck her down like one dead.

'I have seen people in their coffins, who didn't look half so death-like,' she whispered; 'she was that dark, and her face and her eyes were so fierce, and her arms so shrivelled, and her hands so like claws going to make a clutch at me; and she had a red mark round her throat,

as if she had been wearing a necklace too tight.'

'Did she say anything to you?' Mrs Tippens forced herself to ask.

'No; she was just going to speak when I screamed out with horror. Shall I ever forget her?—ever—ever!' and she buried her head despairingly in the pillow.

'Well, Polly, lass, how do you find yourself now?' said Mr Pendell, coming into the room at this juncture, and causing a welcome diversion, at least to Mrs Tippens' fancy. 'You're getting all right now, aren't you? Ah, I felt afraid what was coming; did I say to you, or did I not, on this side of Whitechapel Church, "You've been a-overdoing of it, Mary; you'll have a turn of them spasms to-morrow"?''

For answer Mary only put her hand in her husband's and lay strangely still and quiet.

'Bob has gone for the doctor,' proceeded Mr Pendell, nodding across at Mrs Tippens.

In replying, Mrs Tippens looked at the patient and then nodded back at him.

Before morning broke Mrs Pendell had brought a child prematurely into the world. That she lived and the baby lived the doctor assured Mr Pendell was owing entirely to Mrs Tippens' extraordinary devotion and excellent nursing; and Mr Pendell declared solemnly to Mrs Tippens he would never forget her goodness—'night or day, she had only to say what she wanted, and he would be quite at her service'—a promise he found it convenient to forget when evil days fell upon Dick and his wife.

While these events and exchanges of amenities were passing, there happened a curious experience to Mrs Tippens one night while she was off duty.

Her husband was out on 'a late job,' and had told her not to sit up for him; and Mrs Tippens having undressed and said her prayers, and placed a box of matches where she could instantly lay hand upon it, was about to blow

out the candle and step into bed when from the little room at the end of the passage there came a chorus of '*Mother! MOTHER! MOTHER!*' which caused her, without making any addition to her toilet beyond instinctively thrusting her bare feet into a pair of her husband's slippers, to snatch up the candle and rush to the place where her children slept.

'Now then, what is all this noise about?' she asked, seeing they were every one alive and each sitting bolt upright in bed. Theoretically Mrs Tippens was nothing if not a disciplinarian, but the young ones twisted her round their little fingers for all that. 'You'll bring all the lodgers down; I have a great mind to give each of you a good whipping.'

'There was a woman in the room, mamma!' said Mrs Tippens' second-born.

'And she came and touched me,' added the youngest of the trio.

'Yes, that she did, I see her,' exclaimed the eldest son; 'a little woman with hair hanging about her like yours, only grey and not so long, and with eyes as black as Lucy's new doll's, the one Mr Pendell gave her, and as dark as that man with the white turban we saw in the Strand and—'

'Hold your tongue this instant, never let me hear your nonsense again,' interrupted Mrs Tippens angrily. 'You had too much pudding for supper, that's what's the matter with you, and you got the nightmare and woke up thinking you saw all sorts of things.'

'But we couldn't all have had nightmares,' persisted Dick, who was a sturdy lad, and his father's pride and hope; 'I saw her go up to Effie and lay her hand on her.'

'It was cold too,' supplemented the child.

'And I saw her as well,' capped Lucy, fearful of lagging behind the others in this little matter of renown and glory.

'You are very naughty children,' answered Mrs Tippens,

in a superior sort of tone; then, descending to details, 'is it so very likely, Dicky, you could see anyone in the dark.'

'Oh, but she brought a light with her, a sort of a lamp.'

At this point Mrs Tippens collapsed. If old Mrs Jones were able, not merely to go wandering about a house for which she paid no rent or taxes, but also to find her own light, what other feat might that lady not be expected to perform? 'Now, never let me hear any more of such folly,' she said, however, valiantly, upon the principle that most noise is to be got out of an empty barrel; 'I'll turn the key in the door, and then you'll know nobody can get in.'

'No, leave the key inside, and I'll lock the door, and then, if she comes again, I'll holloa.'

'You'd better not,' retorted his mother, so sharply that Dick, discomfited, wrapped the bedclothes about his head, and twisting himself up like a hedgehog, lay repeating in a sort of rhyme the description of the woman who had broken in upon his rest.

That Mrs Tippens did not sleep much during the course of the night—no, not even when her husband was snoring by her side, and the children had long sunk into slumber—will be readily imagined.

III

Few things had ever caused more excitement in a neighbourhood than the disappearance of Dr and Mrs Jones. Here to-day and gone to-morrow; gone, without beat of drum or sound of fife; gone without the excitement of furniture moving, or cab laden with luggage, or funeral pomp and ceremony; even a one-horse hearse, without plumes or mutes, or decorous wands, or long black cloaks,

or hatbands, or mourning coaches to follow, would have been better than this silent, mysterious flitting.

If the earth had suddenly opened and swallowed up husband and wife, they could not have vanished more utterly. There was the house they had lived in, but where were they?

What secret did that one night hold which all the intelligence of the whole parish failed to elucidate? Where was he? What was more to the point, where was *she*? Upon this last question public opinion at length became unanimous. She was buried in the cellars. Her husband had murdered her—so it was finally decided—and after killing the ‘poor dear’ had disposed of her remains in the manner indicated. That an industrious course of digging and grubbing brought no body or bones to light proved nothing but that ‘the doctor was a deep one,’ to quote the observations of local wiseacres.

‘He used her cruel in her lifetime,’ said one.

‘Aye, that he did,’ capped another. ‘And he wouldn’t give her the chance of Christian burial. She’s lying hidden away in some dark corner; no wonder the creature can’t rest there. No; I wouldn’t sleep a night in that house, not if you counted me down a hundred pounds in golden sovereigns.’

‘Neither would I, was it ever so.’

‘For there’s not a doubt she walks.’

‘Of course she does. Didn’t my own cousin, when she was coming along the passage one summer’s night, feel like an icy wind at the nape of her neck, and as if a cold hand was laid flat on her shoulders? And she always says she knows if she had looked round she’d have seen the old woman with her grey hair—’

‘That he used to drag her about by—’

‘Streaming down her back, and her eyes, filled with hunger and ill-treatment, staring through the darkness.’

‘The house ought to be pulled to the ground—that’s

what ought to be done with it—'

'And not one stone left on another—'

'And those cellars thoroughly examined.'

'It's my belief there's some secret place in them that hasn't been found out yet.'

'Very likely. You know it is reported there used to be a passage big enough for a man to creep along from there to the Thames.'

'Bless and save us—maybe he has put her in the river.'

'No, no; though he was wicked enough for that or anything else, she's in the house somewhere right enough, and if she could speak she would say so.'

'I wonder where he is?'

'Lord knows. Enjoying himself, most likely, beyond the seas.'

'I suppose he was about the worst man you ever knew.'

'I suppose he was about the worst man anybody ever knew.'

'And the cleverest.'

'Aye, he had brains to do anything, but they all turned to wickedness.'

It often happens that a man obtains a reputation for talent in his own immediate circle on very slight and insufficient grounds; but in the case of Dr Jones, popular rumour did not exaggerate the missing gentleman's abilities.

He was very clever indeed. He was so clever he might have risen to almost any height in his profession, had he not been at once lazy and self-indulgent. His father having lived and practised before, he succeeded to a prosperous business and a wide connexion. When he first started on his own account, all the old houses in the street where he lived, and all the old houses in many other streets and squares and terraces and groves near at hand, were inhabited by well-to-do City people, by widows amply dowered, by men who had made their money in trade and were now living in affluent retirement.

It was a capital parish for a doctor to settle in; none of your new neighbourhoods, tenanted by mere birds of passage; once a medical man got a patient he had a chance of keeping him for many years. There were names on Dr Jones' books of people and families who had been physicked by the Joneses for more than half a century. Never a man began life under more auspicious circumstances.

He had the medical ball at his feet. Old ladies adored him, because he ordered them exactly what he knew they liked in the way of eating; old gentlemen were quite sure he understood their complaints, when he declared 'a few glasses of sound wine could hurt no one.' He met the best physicians and surgeons in consultation and people agreed if any man could put a person on his legs again that man was Dr Jones.

But as time went on, and Dr Jones waxed more prosperous and less careful, it was found that, in spite of his many admirable virtues, he had grave faults. In no single respect did his moral character attain to that high standard which a doctor, above all other men, ought to try to reach. Things were whispered about him which mothers felt could not be spoken of before the younger members of the family; things indeed, which were, even among matrons, mentioned with chairs drawn close together, and bated breath and much uplifting of eyes and hands.

Fact is, the decency and restraint of respectable English society had become intolerable to the successful practitioner. For a long time he contented himself with sowing his bad wild oats at a distance from his dwelling—drinking, gambling, and leading the loosest of lives in the many disreputable haunts to be found on the north side of the Thames, instead of frequenting those in his own county of Surrey. But by degrees he began to fall into evil habits near home; then into the midst of that very sanctuary presided over by a maiden sister of uncertain age and rigid morality, he introduced all manner of wickedness.

The day came when Miss Jones could endure the drinking and the smoking and the card-playing and the boon-companions no longer. With a certain stately dignity she packed up her belongings and left the house where she had been born. Further, she employed a lawyer to disentangle her pecuniary affairs from those of her brother. Then all their little world knew dreadful things must be going on at Dr Jones'. His character, or rather lack of character, was discussed both by church and chapel goers. His doings added a fresh zest to parish visiting, for, of course, the poor knew even more about the doctor's sins than their betters. His tastes led him to prefer bold, flaunting women to their more modest, if not less frail, sisters; and the brazen impudence of the 'dreadful creatures' he successively selected for housekeepers furnished as constant a theme for comment and gossip as the shortcomings of Dr Jones himself.

'He wants a wife to steady him,' said one lady, whose daughter had been marriageable for nearly a third part of the time allotted by the Psalmist to man's sojourn on earth.

Alas! poor soul, her wishes blinded her. All the wives of all the patriarchs could not have steadied Dr Jones. He had started on a muck, and was running it blindly, like one possessed. Had he lived in the former days, one might have said that not one devil merely but a legion had taken for habitation the handsome fleshly temple of his body.

In the way of open sin, unblushing audacious wickedness, no medical man, perhaps, ever vied with Dr Jones.

His house, after his sister's departure, became a scandal and a reproach, and yet so great was the doctor's skill he still had patients, and good paying patients too, but they were all of his own sex; the man did not live who could have sent for him to attend wife, or sister, or mother, or daughter.

So his family practice slipped into other and cleaner hands, and another and wiser general practitioner grew

rich upon Dr Jones' leavings.

All at once society was amazed by the rumour that the doctor was going to be married to a lady possessed of great wealth; so report said, adding that ere long wonderful changes might be looked upon in the old house.

It was swept and garnished at any rate, the drawing-room smartened up, a brougham purchased, the latest and most utterly objectionable housekeeper dispatched about her business, whatever it might be, two respectable servants engaged, a man hired to look after the horse, answer the door, and prove a general credit to the street. Dr Jones himself left off smoking pipes and took to cigars instead; he eschewed the local public houses, forswore billiards, all packs of cards were cleared out of the dwelling; he washed, he shaved; he wore a coat instead of a dressing-gown, and he was to be found, by such patients as desired to see him, before twelve o'clock, till which time he had of late been in the habit of taking his rest in bed.

Things were looking up; the Mrs Jones who was to be, had, people felt, already achieved wonders; she was a credit to her sex; ladies admitted they could not possibly ever have the husband again as a medical man, but they might once more receive him as an acquaintance. Prodigals are always interesting, perhaps because no one ever really believes they will reform, and Dr Jones was a specially delightful prodigal—so clever, so handsome, so reckless, so wicked, so extravagant.

He had studied at one time at a German University, and it had somehow been ascertained that no wilder spirit ever troubled the peace of the quaint old town that lay under the shadow of the frowning castle.

His world which, a short time previously, failed to find words strong enough to express its reprobation of his conduct, now began to make excuses for him. Perhaps his faults had been exaggerated, possibly there was only a modicum of truth in the reports which had been spread

abroad concerning his doings: clever men always make enemies, the tattle of the lower orders could not be exactly depended upon; and in fine, to put the matter in a nutshell, it was at length unanimously decided to call on Mrs Jones when she returned from the honeymoon.

There was something after these visits for gossips to talk about! What countrywoman could she be?—where had he met her?—what was she?—who was she?—what had she been?

Years seemed to stretch between her and the doctor—on the wrong side, of course.

She was little, she was old, she was plain, she was ignorant, and she was most furiously jealous. She could not endure her husband to look at or speak to any other woman. Even the elderly unmarried daughter of her mother, who was a widow, who would have liked Seraphina to undertake the doctor's case, even this innocent ewe lamb seemed unbearable to the bride.

No use now to think of pleasant little parties to which Mrs Jones and her reformed husband might be bidden. No card-tables, no carpet-dances, no snug dinners, no safe and harmless social intercourse, which it had been hoped might prove to the repentant doctor as refreshing and non-intoxicating as a course of milk, lemonade, and cocoa to the once infuriated drunkard.

On the whole, perhaps, the matrons, in their hearts, thought Mrs Jones' virtues worse than her husband's vices; tacitly it was agreed not to force acquaintanceship on her. Possibly she had her own set of friends, and it was felt it would be most undesirable to introduce foreigners of no respectable colour into the bosom of British families who had made their money in the City, as everybody knew; and who piqued themselves upon the strictness of their morals, the length of their purses, and the strength of their prejudices.

One gentleman, whose own face was as rosy as a peony, declared, with a mild asseveration, 'Jones has married a

blackamoor'; but Mrs Jones was not black, only exceedingly brown, so brown that if she darkened much more, as time went on, she bade fair eventually to outvie the rich splendour of the old Spanish mahogany chairs, which had been recovered and repolished to do her honour.

IV

At the end of little more than three years from the date of his marriage, it might have been truly said of Dr Jones that his last state was worse than his first. How many demons eventually took up their habitation within him it would be impossible to say; but the doings of the Joneses' household, more particularly the doings of its master, became a terror and reproach to the neighbourhood.

How the case really stood no one ever exactly knew; all sorts of rumours and stories passed from mouth to mouth. She would not give him a shilling of her money, so gossip averred. He had stood over her with a cutting whip to compel her to sign papers, and then she would not; a mode of proceeding on the part of Dr Jones to practise before witnesses, which was, to say the least of the matter, unlikely. Popular report asserted he starved her; but as she generally answered the street-door herself, was free to walk in and out if she pleased, and could have told any tradesmen to bring her anything she fancied, this was evidently a libel. At one time an idea got abroad that the whole tale of her fortune had been a myth; that the doctor had been taken in, and that there were dreadful quarrels between them in consequence; but the boastings of various servants who declared they had seen her with 'rolls on rolls' of banknotes and with such diamonds and rubies as the 'Queen of Sheba or Solomon himself could have had nothing more splendid,' negatived the truth of this statement.

Money or no money, however, the Joneses were a miserable couple. Mrs Jones could not and would not endure a female servant about the house; as fast as they were engaged they went: a fortnight was a long time for any woman, young or old, to stop in the situation, and so ere long the house acquired that look of dirt and neglect some houses seem especially able to assume at the shortest notice. Little more than three years married and already the grass growing between the stones in the stableyard was nearly a foot high. The high-stepping horse had long been sold, and the brougham also; the new piano, never opened, followed suit; and about the same time Dr Jones, giving up all idea of reformation and practice, and abandoning the rôle of a repentant prodigal, returned to his swine and his husks on the Middlesex side of the river; for he could not enjoy even such companionship and diet on his own side of the water, for fear Mrs Jones might take it in her head to mar with her presence the delights of an evening in some low public house or lower music hall, or lower depth still; for, if all stories were to be believed, the doctor went down very low indeed. Accordingly, when Christmas, for the fourth time after that inauspicious and, as some people went so far as to say, unchristian marriage, was approaching, people felt Dr Jones had run about the length of his tether.

A change of some sort seemed imminent. He was in debt in the neighbourhood, a thing he had never been known to be in before. Even the few things sent into that evil house were not paid for, and hitherto the doctor's credit had been so good that he owed in the neighbourhood more than might otherwise have been the case.

Mrs Jones said she would not pay, and the doctor said he could not. Nevertheless, after some parley, he promised to do what he could after Christmas—this was remembered afterwards—and the British tradesman, easily irritated, easily appeased, departed.

No joint, no turkey, no anything was ordered in for the

25th of that December. 'Let him get his Christmas dinner where he gets his other dinners,' said Mrs Jones, in answer to a feeble remonstrance from the crone who came in daily to 'put the place a bit to rights,' a woman so old, so wrinkled, so ugly, so dirty, and so shabby that even Dr Jones, his wife felt, was unlikely to chuck her under the chin, or exchange with her repartees more remarkable for wit than refinement. Apprised in due time of the fare he might expect at home, the once again unreformed prodigal announced his intention of accepting an invitation he said he had received to dine at a friend's house on Christmas Day.

Mrs Jones tried hard to ascertain where this friend lived, but in vain, and still firm to her intention of providing no feast, even for herself, she told Mrs Jubb, the charwoman, to bring in the tea tray and the kettle, and then to go.

About the events of that day and evening and the following morning Mrs Jubb had afterwards much to tell, and she told it.

'As I come up from the kitchen,' she was wont to observe, 'and an awful kitchen that was too, full of black-beetles and slugs—just as I got on the top of the stairs, I saw the master, with his thick coat on, brushing his hat. He put it on and took his umbrella, and he opened the door and slammed it after him, and that was the last I ever see of Dr Jones. I took the tea-things into the drawing-room, and set the kettle on the hob, and I asked Mrs Jones if she was sure I could not do anything else before I went.

'She said, "Quite sure, Mrs Jubb; good evening."

'I had a sort of feeling on me, I did not like to leave her, though I knew John's children would be crying for me at home; and so I made believe to be putting the cup and saucer and plate nearer to her hand, and she looked round in her quick way, and asked sharp, as if I had angered her:

“Didn’t you hear me say ‘good evening,’ Mrs Jubb? You can go.”

‘So I went, and that was the last I ever saw of her. Goodness only knows where they both went to. It was not the next day, but the next day but one, the police got into the house through a window at the back that was left half an inch open (for I went down to the station, and told the inspector I was sure as sure murder had been done, for I could not make anybody hear, and the gas was burning, and the cat, poor thing, mewing in the area, and not another sign of life about the place); and there they found the tray just as I’d left it, and the fire out and the kettle on the hob, and high or low, in garret or cellar, not a trace of Dr or Mrs Jones.’

There was nothing which gratified Mrs Jubb’s numerous friends and acquaintances more than to get her started on this theme.

The story was one which, properly managed, lasted for hours. Mrs Jubb’s feelings, Mrs Jubb’s doings, Mrs Jubb’s sayings, the remarks of the police, the fury and dismay of the tradespeople, and the many observations of the sprightly youth and beauty and strength of the neighbourhood, enabled the narrative to be spun out almost to the length of a three-volume novel.

‘And after all, *where* did Dr and Mrs Jones go?’ once asked an impatient and inquisitive auditor, who chanced to be listening for the first time to the oft-told tale.

‘That’ll never be known on this earth,’ answered Mrs Jubb; ‘my own notion is, she started to follow him—’

‘Then she can’t be buried in the cellars,’ interposed another.

‘You don’t know what a man like that could do,’ said Mrs Jubb; ‘why, even now, poor as I am, I wouldn’t live in the house as them Tippenses are doing, no, not if you paved the hall with golden guineas.’

‘There’s nobody going to tempt you, mother,’ remarked an incredulous youth; ‘I’d chance meeting all

the ghosts out of the churchyard, let alone old Mrs Jones, for a ten-pound note.'

'You don't know what you are talking about, Jim,' retorted Mrs Jubb.

'Well, it was a queer start anyway,' returned the undaunted Jim; 'the Kilkenny cats left their tails behind them, but the doctor and his wife took away every bit of their bodies—'

'And left clothes, and furniture, and bedding, and china, and plate, and linen, and all, just as if they had walked out of the house to spend a day at a friend's.'

Which statement was, indeed, literally true; when the police entered the house they found no corpse, no confusion, no symptom of murder or premeditated departure. Nothing seemed to have been removed except the master and mistress, who had not taken with them even the typical 'comb and toothbrush.'

They were gone. Dr Jones' creditors drew their own conclusions; the wealthy and respectable inhabitants did not know what to believe or think; the police felt disposed to consider the whole affair a make-up between the doctor and his wife; the general public, as usual, were not to be convinced by argument, or confounded by facts, they preferred to believe old Mrs Jones had been murdered and her body what they called 'put away' somewhere about the premises. Shortly after there followed a rumour of hidden treasure, then it was known for certain that the house was haunted, and, further, that no one who tried to live in it but was visited by some misfortune.

When the wind howled outside her dwelling, and shook the casements, and whistled through the keyholes, and the rain beat against the windows with a noise like slapping with an open hand, it was a dear delight to gossips to gather round Mrs Jubb's fire, to which most who came contributed a billet, and hear the whole story again, with additions of what had happened to those venture-

some enough to try conclusions with old Mrs Jones, out of the flesh.

'She was an awful woman to have much to say to when living,' said Mrs Jubb; 'dead, she'll be a thousand times worse.'

'I wonder what she wants wandering about the old house,' said the irrepressible Jim; 'if all accounts are true, she was none so happy in it.'

'Ah, she knows that best herself, and she's not going to tell,' returned Mrs Jubb. 'I wouldn't like to see her, that's all.'

V

To say that Mrs Tippens wished to leave the house when her lodgers and children began to see visions is but to say she was a woman. She told her husband she 'didn't know how she felt,' which meant, as he was too well aware, that she desired to move. She likewise casually mentioned that 'she seemed all nerves,' and that 'she was getting afraid of her own shadow.'

To this Mr Tippens replied he was very sorry, but he hoped she would try and pull herself together a bit, and not be frightened by a lot of lying stories. If they only held their tongues and stayed in the house for a while, people would soon quit talking about old Mrs Jones, and then their lodgers would remain and not give notice because a door creaked.

He reminded her how he was answerable for the rent for three years, that he was not likely ever to get such cheap and convenient premises again, and he implored her, like a good girl, not to be foolish and believe the house was haunted just because a parcel of old women, with Mrs Jubb at their head, chose to give it a bad name.

'But, Dick,' remonstrated Mrs Tippens, 'you know it is said that nobody thrives who stops here. There was old

Mrs Smith broke her leg in two places, and Mrs Curtiss's child was run over in the street; and Mr Perks, that was so respected, fell to robbing his employer, and is in jail now for taking more than a hundred pounds. And John Coombe turned teetotaller, and took to beating his wife—and—'

Mr Tippens laughed outright. 'Make your mind easy, Luce,' he said; 'I'm not likely either to turn teetotaller or take to beating you, lass; and as for the children, if you don't like them sleeping out of your sight, bring them in here till you get some of those notions blown off your mind; and when the days draw out a little, you and they shall have a week at the seaside, and you'll get so strong and well you'll laugh at ghosts, and make quite a joke of old Mrs Jones.'

Poor Mrs Tippens! She only wished her lodgers could see the joke as well, for they were always going; except one old lady on the top floor who was blind and slightly deaf, not a soul stopped any time with her.

'I don't know how it is,' she said to them, 'for I have never seen anything in the house myself.' Whereupon she was told 'she was fortunate,' or reminded 'there were none so blind as those that would not see,' or assured 'her turn was certain to come,' or advised, 'clear out of the house before harm befell her and hers,' 'for it is just a-tempting of Providence to stop in it,' said one person.

'Upon the other hand,' as Mr Tippens, determined to look on the bright side of things, remarked, 'if lodgers were always going they were always coming; and you get such long prices for the rooms, Lucy, they can afford to stay empty part of a week now and then; and see how well the children are, having the yard to play in, which gives them plenty of air and keeps them out of the streets; and you are stronger and better yourself, and would be hearty if you would only stir about a bit more and not sit so constant at your needle.' Further, business with Mr Tippens was so good he had been forced to buy another horse, for which he paid seven pounds. 'That very same

horse,' he often afterwards stated, 'no more nor a month later I sold, as true as I am standing here, for twenty guineas. A fare took a fancy to him and bid me the money, and you may be sure I didn't say "no."'

It was, perhaps, on the strength of this transaction Mrs Tippens and family travelled to Southend for the week previously mentioned to eat shrimps and repair dilapidations, returning to Dr Jones's former residence, as Mr Tippens declared, 'in the best of health and spirits.'

It was not long, however, after their return before Mrs Tippens again began to feel her nerves troubling her. She did not say anything to her husband about the matter, but she mentioned to a few friends she had a 'sort of weight on her,' as if there was 'something wrong, she did not know what,' and 'a fluttering round her heart,' and 'a weakness in her limbs,' and 'a creeping sensation at the back of her neck, when she came along the passage, as though, on the warmest day, a chill, clammy hand was laid there,' after which lucid description of symptoms the whole question of old Mrs Jones was again thoroughly gone into; the statements of all the lodgers repeated *in extenso*, and the gossip current in the neighbourhood retailed for the twentieth time.

Small marvel that, after these conversations, almost exhaustive as they were of the Jones topic, Mrs Tippens, returning to her house, felt a 'waft of raw air' meet her the moment she opened the street door, and something 'brush along the hall after her,' as she passed into the sitting-room. She was braver than most women, and would, had she seen anything tangible, have tried to solve the enigma. But this pursuit by a shadow, this terror of the unseen, the feeling that there was a presence in the room with her which eluded her sight, began to prey on both her mind and body. She longed to cry out, 'Take me away from this evil house or I shall die'; but when Dick entered, his honest face radiant with smiles, his tongue ready to tell of the gentlemen who had hired him

to drive them to Chiswick, and given him about four times his proper fare, and some presents in his hands for 'Luce, old girl,' the words died away on her lips, and she could only thank Dick for thinking so constantly about her, and hang round his neck with a fervour Mr Tippens was not accustomed to from a somewhat undemonstrative wife.

'Who do you think I have had a letter from?' he asked one morning in the early summer, as he came in to breakfast, after a stroll down the street in search of a dried haddock or something savoury for Luce, who 'seemed a bit peaked and off her feed'—Luce cannot speak of those days, and of her husband's constant thought for her, now without tears—'why, from my cousin, Anne Jane; I met the postman—and Luce, I couldn't get anything worth buying for you, only a nasty kipper, but I thought kippers were better than nothing, as you're tired of rashers; well, as I was saying, I met the postman, and he gave me a letter from Anne Jane. Her mistress and the whole family are going abroad, but they are keeping on Anne Jane, you see, though she doesn't go with them. While they are away she has a fancy for a change. She's tired of the sea and Brighton, and thinks she'd like to spend her holiday in London, so she writes to ask if we can take her in; she wants to pay for her board and lodging, but, of course, that's all nonsense; I shouldn't let my uncle's daughter pay a halfpenny for bread as long as I had a penny roll; what do you say, Luce? Shall I tell her to come; she's a good girl, as you know, and a quiet, and she'd be company for you while I am away. What d'ye say, girl?'

'I'd be only too glad for her to come, Dick; but where is she to sleep; we could only give her the room at the end of the passage, and—'

'If that's all, make your mind quite easy; she doesn't come of a family which trouble themselves about what you can't lay hold of. Then you're agreeable to have her, my

girl; if you're not, just say the word—'

'I can't tell you how pleased I should be to have her, only—'

'I'll make that all right, old woman,' and accordingly that very same day Dick went out and bought three sheets of notepaper for a penny, and three envelopes for the same price; and in the silent seclusion of the stable, while the horsekeeper was away for his dinner, indited an epistle to his cousin, in which he assured her of a warm welcome, of his determination not to take a farthing of her hard-earned wages, and of Lucy's delight at the prospect of showing her the London sights. 'My wife's the best wife ever lived,' he finished, 'but she's a bit down at present, and I know you'll cheer her up.'

'So no more at present, from your loving cousin,

R. TIPPENS.

'P.S. I hope you're not afraid of ghosts, for folks will have it this house is haunted, though neither Luce or myself have ever seen anything worse nor ourselves.'

All in good time Miss Anne Jane Tippens arrived at the house tenanted by her cousins from London Bridge Station in a four-wheeler, on the top of which appeared a trunk, encased in a neat holland cover, bound with red, the handiwork of Anne Jane, who paid the cabman his exact fare duly ascertained beforehand, and walked in the hall old Mrs Jones was supposed to haunt, laden with all the impedimenta perishable creatures of the frailer sex are so fond of carrying whithersoever they go—a withered nosegay, a basket filled with seaweed and shells, a band-box, another paper-box, oblong, and a few paper parcels were amongst the baggage; but at length everything was stowed away in the room Dr Jones had used as a surgery, and Mrs Tippens stood surveying the 'very genteel figure' of her husband's cousin, as that young person, after refreshing laving of her dusty face, stood before the glass,

'doing up' her hair.

Miss Tippens was the incarnation of the ideal sewing-maid in a good family.

Tall, but not too tall; thin, but not too thin; with pallid face, brown eyes, thick hair brushed back, and tightly plaited till it looked of no account, not pretty or ugly, quiet of movement, soft of voice; a good girl who—at last her toilet finished—turned to Mrs Tippens and said:

'Now, dear, you'll let me help you all I can while I stay here.'

VI

'I never told her one single word about old Mrs Jones; there seemed a spell on me,' said Mrs Tippens, using the approved formula of her class, when speaking, subsequently, concerning the events which rendered Miss Tippens' visit memorable. 'That very first day as ever was she said, with that still sort of laugh of hers, Dick had wanted her not to come if she felt anyways shy of ghosts. "I have always had rather a wish to see a ghost," she went on, making my very blood run cold with the light way she talked, and maybe old Mrs Jones listening to her for aught I could tell. "What sort of a ghost is it you keep here, Lucy?"

"There has been a lot of chatter about the house," I made answer, "but I don't say anything on the subject indoors for fear of the children being frightened. People pretend there is something not right in the place, but nothing has come Dick's way or mine either"; and then I began talking of something else and Anne took the hint; she was a wonderfully wise, prudent sort of girl, as girls have to be who get into high families and want to keep their situations.'

The day following Miss Tippens' arrival was devoted to

showing her some of the London sights. She had been in London before, but only for a short time when 'the family' came up to town, and she being kept hard at work under the eye of an exceedingly strict housekeeper was unable to see any of the wonders of the metropolis, except Kensal Green Cemetery, concerning which cheerful place she spoke with a good deal of enthusiasm. As a foretaste of the delights to come, Mrs Tippens took her to the Abbey, showed her the exterior of the Houses of Parliament, the National Gallery, Northumberland House, the fountains in Trafalgar Square, Covent Garden, Somerset House, Temple Bar, St Paul's, and the Monument. By the time they had arrived at Fish Street Hill, Anne Jane was tired out, and declining to climb Pope's 'tall bully,' asked Mrs Tippens if they were very far from home, 'because,' she added, 'I don't think I can walk much more.'

'Dear me!' cried Mrs Tippens, 'I ought to have remembered you were not over strong; why, you look fit to drop. We'll go down to the pier and take the boat straight back, and you can rest all day to-morrow, for I shan't be able to stir out, as our first-floors are leaving, and I must see about getting the rooms fit for anyone to see.'

'You'll sleep without rocking to-night, young woman,' observed Mr Tippens, as they all sat together over an early supper.

'I always sleep wonderfully sound,' replied Miss Tippens, stating the fact as if some peculiar merit attached to it.

'And you'd better lie in in the morning, and I'll bring you a cup of tea,' said Mrs Tippens, kindly hospitable.

'Ay, make her stop a-bed,' exclaimed Mr Tippens. 'I'll be bound she gets none too much sleep in service. I'd like well to see a bit of colour in your cheeks before you leave us.'

Next morning Mrs Tippens took a tray, on which was set out a nice little breakfast, into her visitor's bed-

chamber. Anne Jane did not look much better for her night's rest and morning sleep.

'I woke at five,' she said, 'and then went off again, and never roused till you came in, and yet I feel as tired as possible. I am not much accustomed to walking, and we did walk a long way yesterday.'

'Yes, we went too far,' agreed Mrs Tippens, and then she sat down beside her guest's pillow, and tucked the sheet under the tray to keep it steady, and hoped she would relish her breakfast, which, Anne declared, 'she was sure to do, if only because they were so kind to her.'

'We would like to be kind to you,' said Mrs Tippens; adding, so that no more might be said on the subject, 'and you slept well?'

'Yes; but isn't it funny, all the earlier part of the night I was dreaming about a woman being murdered. It was talking about old times, and wandering about those ancient places and tombs and monuments, I suppose, made me think of such things. I was quite glad to see the sun shining in at the window when I woke, for oh, the dream did appear just like reality!' And the dreamer paused to drink a little tea, and take a bit of bread and butter, and munch a few leaves of watercress, and taste the delicate slices of ham Dick himself had cut, what he called 'Vauxhall fashion,' to tempt his cousin's poor appetite, while Mrs Tippens sat silent, afraid, she could not tell why, of what might be coming.

'Dreams are strange things,' proceeded Miss Tippens, after the fashion of a person originating an entirely novel idea, 'and mine was a strange dream.'

'Your tea will be stone cold, dear,' interposed Mrs Tippens. It was but deferring the evil hour, she felt, yet every moment of delay seemed a moment gained.

'I don't like it very warm,' answered the other, 'and I want to tell you my dream. I thought I was in a room I had never seen before, with three windows to the street, and one long, narrow window that looked out I didn't know

on what. The room was wainscoted about two yards from the floor, well furnished with chairs and tables; I could feel a thick carpet under my feet, and see a glass over the chimney-piece, in which a woman was looking at herself. Oh! Luce, she was the strangest woman I ever beheld, so little, she was forced to stand on a footstool to see herself in the glass; she had a brown face and grey hair, and her dress was unfastened, and a necklace, that sparkled and glittered, clasped her neck, and she pinned a brooch, that shone like fire, in the front of her under bodice; and on a little table beside her lay an open jewel case, in which there were precious stones gleaming like green and yellow stars.'

'Do eat your breakfast, Anne, and never mind the dream; you can tell it to me afterwards.'

'There isn't much more to tell,' answered Anne. 'All at once she saw in the glass the door open, and a man come in. With a stifled scream she jumped down from the stool, seized the case, and tried to close her dress up round her throat, and hide the necklace; but he was too quick for her. He said something, I could not hear what; and then, as she cowered down, he caught her and wrenched the case out of her hand, and made a snatch at the necklace just as she flew upon him, with all her fingers bent and uttering the most terrible cries that ever came out of a woman's lips—I think I hear them now; then, in a minute she fell back, and I could see she was only kept from dropping on the floor by the tight grip he had on the necklace. I seemed to know she was being choked, and I tried to call out, but I could not utter a sound. I strove to rush at the man, but my feet felt rooted where I stood; then there came a great darkness like the darkness of a winter's night.'

'Let me get you another cup of tea, dear,' said Mrs Tippens, in a voice which shook a little in spite of all her efforts to steady it; 'you've let this stand so long it is not fit to drink.'

'It is just as I like my tea, thank you,' answered Miss Tippens, cheerfully, as she devoted herself to the good things provided. 'What do you think of my dream?'

'That I shouldn't have liked to dream it,' replied Mrs Tippens. 'Do let me pour you out some more tea, and then I must run away, for the first-floor lodgers will be wanting me.' Which was a feint on the part of Mrs Tippens, who felt she could not bear to hear anything more at the moment about the little woman with the brown face and the grey hair, whose portrait she recognised too surely as that of old Mrs Jones.

'Though why she can't let us, who never did her any harm, alone, I can't imagine,' considered Mrs Tippens. 'This is a dreadful house—true enough, there has been murder done in it, and the blood is crying aloud for vengeance. I wonder where that wicked wretch put her. Oh! Mrs Jones, if you'd only tell us where your poor bones are mouldering, I am sure Dick would have them decently buried, let the cost be what it might.'

The first-floor lodgers were gone, and the rooms scrubbed out before Anne Jane, having dressed and settled up her own bedchamber, made her appearance in her cousin's parlour; but when she suggested that they might go upstairs and have a look at the apartments just vacated, Mrs Tippens made the excuse that they were not exactly in order.

'The charwoman is up there still,' she exclaimed; 'she's making half-a-day.'

'What a wonderfully nice house for Dick to have got,' continued Miss Tippens.

'Yes,' answered Dick's wife faintly. There was nothing to be objected to in the size of the house, if only Mrs Jones could have been kept out of it!

'If you don't mind my leaving you, Anne, for half an hour, I think I'll just run out and get a few things we want,' she said. 'Supposing anyone should come after the first floor, Mrs Burdock can show it.' Which would

have been all very well, had not Mrs Burdock, ten minutes after Mrs Tippens' departure, put her head into the parlour to say that she should like to go home to see to her children's dinners, and, if it made no difference, she would come back in the afternoon and wipe over the windows and blacklead the grates. 'The rooms are quite clean and sweet,' she added, 'if anybody by chance do come to look at them.'

The children were out in the yard playing, the meat was cooking beautifully in the oven, the fruit pudding was boiling gently on the trivet, the potatoes were in the saucepan, ready to be put on the fire at a certain time which Mrs Tippens had indicated; the street was simmering in the noon-tide heat of a summer's day, and Anne Jane, making a frock for the baby asleep in its cradle, was thinking Lucy's lines had fallen into very pleasant places, when there came at the front door a knock, which she instinctively understood meant lodgers.

They were two young gentlemen, attracted by the neat appearance of the house, by the snowy curtains in Mrs Tippens' room, the bird-cage hanging in the window, the flowers in bloom, ranged in pots on the sill.

'Could we see the rooms you have to let?' asked the elder, who acted as spokesman.

'Certainly, sir; will you be pleased to walk in?' answered Anne Jane in her best manner; and motioning to the strangers to precede her, she followed them up to the first floor, where she flung wide the door of the principal apartment.

'By Jove!' exclaimed both men, almost simultaneously, 'who'd have thought there was such a jolly room in this old house?' and they walked over to one of the windows and looked out into the street, and then turned towards the fireplace, and then—

'Hello! What's the matter?' cried the first speaker, hurrying towards the door, against the lintel of which Mr Tippens' cousin was leaning, looking more like a

corpse than a living woman. 'Here, hand over that chair, Hal, I believe she is going to faint.'

'No,' she gasped; 'no—no—I shall be better— directly.'

At that moment Mrs Tippens, who had heard from a neighbour some gentlemen were gone to look at her rooms, put her key in the lock and came hurrying upstairs. The first glance told her what had happened.

'My cousin is not very strong, sir,' she said, in a voice she tried to keep steady, though she was trembling in every limb. 'I'll just take her into the parlour, and be with you in a moment, if you please.'

'Let me help you,' entreated the younger man. 'Take my arm, do.—Is she subject to attacks of this sort?' he went on, speaking in a lower tone.

'Not that I know of,' was the reply. 'Perhaps, sir,' suggested Mrs Tippens, 'you would not mind looking over the rooms by yourselves. There is no one in but the children; I scarcely like leaving my cousin alone.'

'Is there anything you want—anything I can run out and get for you?' asked the young fellow pleasantly. 'Do you think that a little brandy—'

'I have some in the house, thank you, sir,' answered Mrs Tippens; and so at last she got rid of him, and stood looking at Anne Jane, who, leaning back in Mr Tippens' own particular armchair, looked up at her and murmured, 'The room.'

'Yes, dear.'

'It was the room of my dream.'

'I thought as much.'

'Did he kill her there?'

'Who's to tell? Nobody knows whether she is alive or dead, for that matter.'

VII

'No, sir, I won't deceive you. If you are wanting rooms, as you say, for a permanency, and think of buying good furniture that would get knocked about and ruined in moving, and settling down comfortably in the next lodgings you take, you had better not come here.'

'Why, are you going to leave the house?'

'My husband is answerable for the rent for nearly two years longer,' replied Mrs Tippens evasively. 'No, sir, it is not that; I wish it was.'

'Have you any infectious illness in the place?'

'I'd rather have smallpox,' broke out Mrs Tippens, who felt she could endure her trouble no longer in silence. 'We might get rid of that, but we can't get rid of old Mrs Jones.'

'Who is she—a lodger?'

'Worse than the worst of lodgers, sir; a lodger can do no more than owe rent, or at the most take things that don't belong to him; but Mrs Jones pays no rent, and wants to live in every room in the house, and as fast as new lodgers come and we think we are going to be a bit comfortable at last, drives them to give notice. Fever and ague would be small evils in comparison to old Mrs Jones, and why she torments us so I can't imagine, we never did the woman any injury; and as for her money I am sure if it was lying in bags of gold and silver at my feet I wouldn't touch a coin of it.'

The two men stared at each other in amazement, then the elder said solemnly:

'In Heaven's name, *who* is Mrs Jones?'

'She was the wife of a Dr Jones, sir. He once rented this house. He and she disappeared the same night, and have never been heard of since.'

'But I thought you said she lived here?'

'No, sir; I don't know where she lives, if she is living at all; but this is the way of it: one set of lodgers after another say they are very sorry but they can't stop on account of old Mrs Jones. They either meet her on the stairs, or she takes a chair at the table when they are having their dinner, or she goes into their bedroom with a light in her hand, and then my cousin must get dreaming about her and, as you saw, was taken bad the moment she crossed the threshold of this room. I am sure, sir, I never did believe in ghosts and suchlike before we came here, but I can't disbelieve now, after what I've heard; and so I tell you not to take the apartments or to go to any expense buying furniture, for you wouldn't stop—I know you wouldn't—a fortnight is the longest anybody ever stays now.'

'That settles the matter, we'll come, and we'll stay longer. For my own part I have always rather wanted to see a ghost and—'

'Oh, don't talk that way, please, sir.'

'Well, at any rate, we'll pay you for the rooms for a month certain, and if you can do our cooking and make us a little comfortable, we won't quarrel about terms.'

'But I don't think you exactly understand, sir.'

'Yes I do, and I trust we shall know more about old Mrs Jones than we do now before we are much older.'

'I hope you won't buy good furniture, sir, till you have been here a few days; I can spare enough just to make the place tidy for you to come into.' And so it was settled; the young man, after saying they would like to take possession the same evening, put a month's rent and money to provide grocery and so forth into Mrs Tippens' reluctant hand, and departed.

'Let what will happen, they can't say I did not warn them,' thought Mrs Tippens, as she hurried off to see whether Anne Jane had been able to attend to the potatoes or if they were boiled to pulp.

Meantime the friends, walking along the street together,

remarked, 'What a strange-looking girl that young woman who so nearly fainted.'

'Yes, cataleptic I shouldn't wonder; did you notice what a far-away, unseeing sort of expression there was in her eyes?'

'I did; and what a thick white complexion, if I may use the term.'

'That is a queer notion about old Mrs Jones; we must get Mrs Tippens up to make tea for us some night and hear all the rights of the story.'

'And I'll take the liberty of putting fresh locks on the doors.'

'You think it is somebody playing tricks, then?'

'Of course; what else can it be? You don't believe in disembodied spirits taking up their abode in brick and mortar houses, I suppose?'

It was a strange thing, as Mrs Tippens often subsequently remarked, that from the time the new lodgers, who were medical students, took possession of the first floor, people seemed able to stay in the other parts of the house. Where old Mrs Jones had gone, and what old Mrs Jones was doing, could only, Mrs Tippens felt, be matter for conjecture; one comfort, she ceased to roam about the rooms and wander up and down the staircase; there were even times when Mrs Tippens, passing through the hall, forgot to remember that sudden waft of cold air and the chilly hand laid on the back of her neck; she still—force of habit, perhaps—instinctively refrained from looking round, lest she should encounter the streaming grey hair and dark face and fierce black eyes of old Mrs Jones; but at the end of a fortnight she began to feel, as she expressed the matter, 'quite comfortable and easy in her mind.'

She had said something of this sort one evening to her cousin, and was waiting vainly for a reply, when Miss Tippens, without the slightest apparent reason, burst into a despairing fit of tears.

'What, crying? For the Lord's sake, girl, tell me what you are crying for,' exclaimed Mrs Tippens. 'Do, Anne, dear, if you are in any trouble, only trust it to me, and I'll help you all I can, and so will Dick. Who has vexed you?'

'*It's—old—Mrs—Jones,*' sobbed Anne Jane. 'I have tried hard for your sake, but I can't bear her any longer; I must go away—I must—I shall be a raving maniac if I stop in this house much longer. Why has she fastened on me?' asked Miss Tippens, looking at her relation with streaming eyes. 'Oh, Lucy, why has she left everyone else in the house to give me no peace of my life—I can't sleep for dreaming of her—she is at my bedside every night wanting me to do something for her, or go to some place with her; and then the whole day long I keep trying to remember what she said and what she wanted, and I can't; no, Lucy, for no advantage to you, or any other human being, can I face the horror of her any longer.'

At Anne Jane's first words Mrs Tippens' work dropped from her hands on to the floor, and during the delivery of this address she remained gazing at the speaker with a sort of fascinated terror; then she cried out:

'Oh, dear! oh, dear! and just when I thought we were all settling down so comfortably; what an awful old woman! But do you ever see her, Anne, except when you are asleep?'

'No, but I feel her round and about me. There's a chilliness blows on my neck, and a coldness creeps down my spine, and I seem always to know that there's somebody beside or behind me; it's dreadful—if it was to go on, I'd rather be dead and out of my misery at once.'

'Suppose I made you up a bed somewhere else,' suggested Mrs Tippens.

'What would be the good? She's in every room in the house; she's up and down the stairs, and on the roof, and along the parapet, and—'

'Don't talk about her any more, you'll frighten me,' exclaimed Mrs Tippens.

'And haven't I been frightened? How would you like to lie in the dark and know a woman—'

'Mrs Tippens,' called a voice, which made both women jump.

'Lor!' exclaimed Mrs Tippens, recovering herself, 'you needn't be frightened, Anne, it's only Mr Maldon—(yes, sir, I'm coming)—I remember he left word with little Lucy he wanted to see me before he went out this morning, and what with one thing and another I quite forgot it.' Having tendered which explanation, Mrs Tippens hurried to the first floor, leaving Anne Jane sitting with her hands tightly folded and her great eyes fixed on vacancy, or—old Mrs Jones.

'Close the door, if you please, Mrs Tippens,' said Mr Maldon, the elder of her two new lodgers, as, after her apologies for her forgetfulness, the nominal mistress of Dr Jones' former residence stood waiting to hear what was wanted. 'For some days past I have wished to speak to you alone. I only think it right to say—'

'Oh, sir, don't, for mercy's sake, say you've seen old Mrs Jones *too*.'

There was such an agony of entreaty in Mrs Tippens' voice, the young man, who did not believe in ghosts, and had expressed a wish to see one, might well have been excused smiling, but he did not smile, he only answered:

'No, but I have seen something else.'

'What, sir?'

'Your cousin wandering about the house in her sleep.'

'In her sleep! When, Mr Maldon?'

'Well, to go no further back, last night. I followed her up to the top of the house, and she was actually going out on the roof, when I gently took her by the arm and walked her down to her own room again. I am afraid she may do herself a mischief. I was careful not to wake her, but if she should be frightened, and wake suddenly,

no one can tell what accident might happen. From the first I thought there was something strange in her appearance, but I should not have imagined she was a sleep-walker.'

'And what should you advise me to do, sir?' asked Mrs Tippens earnestly, for this seemed to her a dreadful thing. For a respectable young woman—and she believed and felt certain Anne Jane to be as respectable a young woman as ever lived, a wise, prudent, sensible, virtuous girl—to go wandering in the middle of the night about a house in which there were lodgers, and be handed down the stairs and back to her own room by any man, young or old, was a matter which appeared in Mrs Tippens' eyes so preposterous, so dreadful, she could scarcely realise it; she had not courage to inquire the fashion of the costume in which Anne Jane started to make her uncomfortable pilgrimage.

'I should advise you to take your cousin to some good medical man,' said Mr Maldon, answering her spoken question. 'There is no doubt she is from some cause thoroughly out of health, but meanwhile I should not say anything to her about this walking in her sleep; only you would do well to take the precaution of locking her door outside at night.'

'Oh, I couldn't do that,' answered Mrs Tippens. 'If she were my worst enemy, instead of my husband's first cousin, I couldn't lock her up in a room alone with old Mrs Jones.'

'Oh—old Mrs Jones!' exclaimed Mr Maldon.

'Begging your pardon, sir, I don't think you would be right to say that about the worst of sinners, let alone a poor, ill-used lady that, if all accounts be true, led a most miserable life in this very house.'

'Yes, yes, that's all very well,' interrupted Mr Maldon, 'but don't you see, my good soul, this tendency of your cousin's explains the whole mystery; gets rid, in fact, of Mrs Jones altogether.'

'In what way?' asked Mrs Tippens.

'Why, only in one way, of course. Your lodgers had heard the story and thought your cousin walking in her sleep must be old Mrs Jones.'

'Yes, sir, but my cousin never entered these doors till two days before yourself, and for nine months previous to that my lodgers were fainting and flitting on account of the woman who came into their room and met them on the stairs.'

'Is that so?' said Mr Maldon, in the tone of a man who feels his theory has no more substantial foundation than an air castle.

'Yes, sir, it is quite true,' answered Mrs Tippens, a little triumphantly—since no one likes to be dispossessed of a point. 'Anne Jane came up from Brighton the day but one before you took these lodgings. All the same, sir, I don't mind telling you that she can't get rest neither night nor day, because of old Mrs Jones.'

'Dreams about her, eh?' suggested the medical student with alacrity.

'She has been crying her eyes out just now because she declares the old lady won't let her be. Stands at her bedside every night regular, wanting her to do something Anne Jane spends her days trying to remember.'

'Really an interesting case,' thought the future medical man, who added aloud: 'Well, Mrs Tippens, I can but repeat my advice, let your cousin see a good doctor, and lock her door on the outside.'

'I am sure, sir, I feel very thankful to you,' answered Mrs Tippens, and she went downstairs and tossed up a very pretty little supper for Dick and his cousin, during the course of which meal she announced in a laughing way to her husband that Anne Jane was not very well, and felt a bit nervous, and that she, Luce, meant to sleep with their visitor; which information she accompanied with such sly looks and such a world of meaning in her face, that Tippens, looking up from the crab, cucumber, lettuce,

and vinegar he was eating in disastrous quantities, answered shortly:

‘All right, old girl.’

Consequently, Mrs Tippens, for once, leaving the custody of her children with Dick, after having cleared away the supper things retired to rest with Miss Tippens.

Mrs Tippens took the side of the bed next the door (which she locked), and firmly decided she would not go to sleep that night. For about an hour, or an hour and a half, she lay awake, thinking, as she afterwards said, ‘of all manner of things’; then she ‘fell over,’ and did not awaken till the room was full of the light of a summer morning’s early dawn.

For a moment she could not remember where she was; then she remembered, and stretching out her hand, found the place her cousin should have occupied empty and cold.

Anne Jane was gone, and Mrs Tippens, rushing to the door, found it unlocked.

VIII

Mrs Tippens, assisted by her husband and Mr Maldon and his friend Mr Whipple, and one of the second-floor lodgers, who was out of work, scoured the neighbourhood for Miss Tippens, and scoured it in vain. That young person seemed to have vanished as utterly as old Mrs Jones. They sought her high, they sought her low; the whole street in confusion; as popular opinion had as yet defined no limit to the powers possessed by Dr Jones’ wife, little doubt existed that Anne Jane had been carried off bodily by the grey-haired lady as an expiation of the sins of the Tippens’ family in continuing the tenancy of a house on which it was ‘well-known a curse rested.’

Who had cursed it, on whom it rested, were matters considered quite irrelevant to the general issue. So far

sickness had passed over and misfortune shunned the latest dwellers in the haunted dwelling. But now it was felt the day of reckoning had been only deferred in order to inflict a heavier punishment. Old Mrs Jones was about to vindicate herself at last. 'And if you don't get out of the place quick,' said Mrs Jubb, who, during the whole of that memorable morning, conducted herself after the manner of some ancient prophetess, 'you'll find far worse to follow. I always told you I couldn't sleep in the house if the hall was paved with golden guineas.'

'Dick, Dick,' cried Mrs Tippens, 'didn't I beg and pray of you long ago to move—that very first night the children saw old Mrs Jones?'

But Dick, not being in a fit state of mind either to argue with his wife or endure her reproaches, mounted to the seat of his neat hansom and drove aimlessly about the streets, asking useless questions of persons totally unable to afford the slightest information as to his cousin's whereabouts.

About three o'clock, however, Anne Jane, in person, appeared at her cousin's door, accompanied by a policeman. Early that morning she had been found trying to open the garden gate of a house in the Stratford Road; as, when remonstrated with concerning the impropriety of her conduct, she still continued knocking and pushing the gate, the policeman seized her left arm and told her she couldn't be allowed to make such a noise; then, for the first time, she turned her face towards him, and he saw, as he expressed himself, 'there was something stranger about the matter than he thought.'

Immediately it dawned upon his understanding that though the woman's eyes were wide open, she did not see him, and that she was not drunk, as he had supposed, but fast asleep.

Therefore he woke her up, and inquired what she was doing there at four o'clock in the morning.

The girl's terror when, suddenly recalled to conscious-

ness, she found herself only partially dressed, in a road perfectly unknown to her, held firmly in the grasp of a stalwart policeman, was so great as utterly to deprive her of speech. She tried to collect her senses, she strove to ask him how she came there, but no word passed her parched and trembling lips. In a very agony of shame and distress, she allowed herself to be led to the station-house; but there, when addressed by the inspector, she broke into a passion of weeping, which culminated in a fit of violent hysterics, that in turn was succeeded by a sort of wandering the doctor regarded as a precursor of some severe illness. 'The girl is quite overwrought,' he said; 'I wonder who this old Mrs Jones is she talks so much about.'

'Oh, save me from her—oh, Luce!—oh, Dick! don't let her come near me again.' At that moment Anne Jane again cried in terror.

'No, she shan't come near you, we won't let her,' observed the doctor soothingly; and after a time he managed to give this strange patient a quieting draught.

'Anyone,' as Mrs Tippens observed, when subsequently commenting upon the conduct of the police, 'could see Anne Jane was a thoroughly respectable girl, who had been carefully brought up,' and accordingly she did not feel so grateful as she ought to have done to the inspector for sending her cousin home in a cab.

'She'll be better with her friends than in a hospital,' said the doctor; and accordingly, when she recovered sufficiently to mention Mr Tippens' address, she was despatched thither under the care of a staid and respectable member of the force.

But nothing could induce her to enter Dick's house, till Mrs Tippens had solemnly promised at once to go out and find a lodging for her elsewhere.

'If I sleep here again she'll never rest till she has killed me,' declared the girl; which utterance seemed so mysterious to the policeman, that, pressing for an explanation,

he was told the whole story of 'old Mrs Jones.'

'And the young woman solemnly declares,' went on the man who repeated the narrative to the inspector, 'that Dr Jones' wife came to her bedside, and bade her get up and dress, and opened the door of the room, and the front door, and made her walk till she was fit to drop through places and streets she had never seen before, till they came to the garden gate of St Julian's; she passed through that and kept beckoning her to follow—"and I know I tried hard, and that you must have awakened me."'

'It's a rather unlikely tale altogether,' observed the inspector, but still he kept the matter in his mind, and thought it worth while to make a few inquiries and set a detective to work; and had a watch kept on Dr Schloss, the great German chemist, who lived in a very secluded manner at St Julian's—the result of all being that one day a policeman appeared at the house, and asking if he could see the doctor, arrested him on the charge of 'Wilful Murder.'

'But this is absurd,' said the great chemist, speaking in very broken English. 'Who is it that you make believe I have murdered?'

'Your wife, Zillah Jones,' was the answer. Whereupon the doctor shrugged his shoulders and inquired who Zillah Jones might be.

Asked if he would come quietly with the policeman, he laughed, and said, 'Oh, yes.' Warned that any statement he made would be used as evidence, he laughed again, and observed he had no statement of any kind to make.

On the way he conducted himself, as was remarked, in a very quiet and gentlemanlike manner; and, arrived at his destination, he requested to be allowed to sit down, as he did not feel very well.

'It is a serious charge to bring against an innocent person,' he said, still speaking in imperfect English. That was the last sentence he uttered. When he was requested

to get up, he did not stir. He was dead—dead as the woman whose remains were found, embalmed in a locked box, in his laboratory at St Julian's.

No one, however, in the neighbourhood where Dr Jones once lived believed, or could be persuaded to believe Dr Schloss and Dr Jones were one and the same person, or that the embalmed body was that of old Mrs Jones. Nothing will ever shake the local mind in its conviction that Dr Jones is still enjoying existence in 'foreign parts,' or that his wife was buried in the cellar of that old-fashioned house where evil befell all who tried to live.

In proof of which conviction it is still told in bated breath how Anne Jane was never able to go back to service, but was forced eventually to return to her native village, where to this day she earns a modest living with her needle; and how, on the very night of that day when Mr Tippens removed his family and goods, cabs and horses excepted, to a dwelling he had taken in the next street, where the lodgers accompanied Mrs Tippens, a passer-by, looking up at the old house, saw something like the figure of a woman, carrying a torch, flit from window to window, and story to story, and ere he had time to think what it meant, beheld flames bursting from every part of the old building.

Before the engines came the fire had got such a mastery it was with difficulty Mr Tippens' horses were saved, to say nothing of the adjoining houses.

It was indeed a conflagration to be remembered, if for no other reason than that standing on the parapet in the fiercest of the fire a woman, with streaming grey hair, was seen wringing her hands in such an apparent agony of distress that an escape was put up, and one of the brigade nearly lost his life in trying to save her.

At this juncture someone cried out with a loud voice:

'It was a witch the doctor married, and fire alone can destroy her!'

Then for a moment there fell a dead silence upon the assembled crowd, while the dreadful figure was seen running from point to point in a mad effort to escape.

Suddenly the roof crashed in, millions of sparks flew upwards from the burning rafters, there was a roar as if the doors of some mighty furnace had been suddenly opened, a blaze of light shot straight towards the heavens, and when the spectators looked again there was no figure to be seen anywhere, only the bare walls, and red flames rushing through the sashless windows of the house once haunted by 'Old Mrs Jones'.

OVER AN ABSINTHE BOTTLE

W. C. Morrow

Arthur Kimberlin, a young man of very high spirit, found himself a total stranger in San Francisco one rainy evening, at a time when his heart was breaking; for his hunger was of that most poignant kind in which physical suffering is forced to the highest point without impairment of the mental functions. There remained in his possession not a thing that he might have pawned for a morsel to eat; and even as it was, he had stripped his body of all articles of clothing except those which a remaining sense of decency compelled him to retain. Hence it was that cold assailed him and conspired with hunger to complete his misery. Having been brought into the world and reared a gentleman, he lacked the courage to beg and the skill to steal. Had not an extraordinary thing occurred to him, he either would have drowned himself in the bay within twenty-four hours or died of pneumonia in the street. He had been seventy hours without food, and his mental desperation had driven him far in its race with his physical needs to consume the strength within him; so that now, pale, weak, and tottering, he took what comfort he could find in the savoury odours which came steaming up from the basement kitchens of the restaurants in Market Street, caring more to gain them than to avoid the rain. His teeth chattered; he shambled, stooped, and gasped. He was too desperate to curse his fate—he could only long for food. He could not reason; he could not understand that ten thousand hands might gladly have fed him; he could think only of the hunger which consumed him, and of food that could give him warmth and happiness.

When he had arrived at Mason Street, he saw a restau-

rant a little way up that thoroughfare, and for that he headed, crossing the street diagonally. He stopped before the window and ogled the steaks, thick and lined with fat; big oysters lying on ice; slices of ham as large as his hat; whole roasted chickens, brown and juicy. He ground his teeth, groaned, and staggered on.

A few steps beyond was a drinking saloon, which had a private door at one side, with the words 'Family Entrance' painted thereon. In the recess of the door (which was closed) stood a man. In spite of his agony, Kimberlin saw something in this man's face that appalled and fascinated him. Night was on, and the light in the vicinity was dim; but it was apparent that the stranger had an appearance of whose character he himself must have been ignorant. Perhaps it was the unspeakable anguish of it that struck through Kimberlin's sympathies. The young man came to an uncertain halt and stared at the stranger. At first he was unseen, for the stranger looked straight out into the street with singular fixity, and the deathlike pallor of his face added a weirdness to the immobility of his gaze. Then he took notice of the young man.

'Ah,' he said, slowly and with peculiar distinctness, 'the rain has caught you too, without overcoat or umbrella! Stand in this doorway—there is room for two.'

The voice was not unkind, though it had an alarming hardness. It was the first word that had been addressed to the sufferer since hunger had seized him, and to be spoken to at all, and have his comfort regarded in the slightest way, gave him cheer. He entered the embrasure and stood beside the stranger, who at once relapsed into his fixed gaze at nothing across the street. But presently the stranger stirred himself again.

'It may rain a long time,' he said; 'I am cold; and I observe that you tremble. Let us step inside and get a drink.'

He opened the door and Kimberlin followed, hope be-

ginning to lay a warm hand upon his heart. The pale stranger led the way into one of the little private booths with which the place was furnished. Before sitting down he put his hand into his pocket and drew forth a roll of bank bills.

'You are younger than I,' he said; 'won't you go to the bar and buy a bottle of absinthe, and bring a pitcher of water and some glasses? I don't like the waiters to come around. Here is a twenty-dollar bill.'

Kimberlin took the bill and started down through the corridor towards the bar. He clutched the money tightly in his palm; it felt warm and comfortable, and sent a delicious tingling through his arm. How many glorious hot meals did that bill represent? He clutched it tighter and hesitated. He thought he smelled a broiled steak, with fat little mushrooms and melted butter in the steaming dish. He stopped and looked back toward the door of the booth. He saw that the stranger had closed it. He could pass it, slip out the door, and buy something to eat. He turned and started, but the coward in him (there are other names for this) tripped his resolution; so he went straight to the bar and made the purchase. This was so unusual that the man who served him looked sharply at him.

'Ain't goin' to drink all o' that, are you?' he asked.

'I have friends in the box,' replied Kimberlin, 'and we want to drink quietly and without interruption. We are in Number 7.'

'Oh, beg pardon. That's all right,' said the man.

Kimberlin's step was very much stronger and steadier as he returned with the liquor. He opened the door of the booth. The stranger sat at the side of the little table, staring at the opposite wall just as he had stared across the street. He wore a wide-brimmed, slouch hat, drawn well down. It was only after Kimberlin had set the bottle, pitcher, and glasses on the table, and seated himself opposite the stranger and within his range of vision,

that the pale man noticed him.

'Oh! you have brought it? How kind of you! Now please lock the door.'

Kimberlin had slipped the change into his pocket, and was in the act of bringing it out when the stranger said:

'Keep the change. You will need it, for I am going to get it back in a way that may interest you. Let us first drink, and then I will explain.'

The pale man mixed two drinks of absinthe and water, and the two drank. Kimberlin, unsophisticated, had never tasted the liquor before, and he found it harsh and offensive; but no sooner had it reached his stomach than it began to warm him, and sent the most delicious thrill through his frame.

'It will do us good,' said the stranger; 'presently we shall have more. Meanwhile, do you know how to throw dice?'

Kimberlin weakly confessed that he did not.

'I thought not. Well, please go to the bar and bring a dice-box. I would ring for it, but I don't want the waiters to be coming in.'

Kimberlin fetched the box, again locked the door, and the game began. It was not one of the simple old games, but had complications, in which judgment, as well as chance, played a part. After a game or two without stakes, the stranger said:

'You now seem to understand it. Very well—I will show you that you do not. We will now throw for a dollar a game, and in that way I shall win the money that you received in change. Otherwise I should be robbing you, and I imagine you cannot afford to lose. I mean no offence. I am a plain spoken man, but I believe in honesty before politeness, I merely want a little diversion, and you are so kind-hearted that I am sure you will not object.'

'On the contrary,' replied Kimberlin, 'I shall enjoy it.'

'Very well; but let us have another drink before we start. I believe I am growing colder.'

They drank again, and this time the starving man took his liquor with relish—at least, it was something in his stomach, and it warmed and delighted him.

The stake was a dollar a side. Kimberlin won. The pale stranger smiled grimly, and opened another game. Again Kimberlin won. Then the stranger pushed back his hat and fixed that still gaze upon his opponent, smiling yet. With this full view of the pale stranger's face, Kimberlin was more appalled than ever. He had begun to acquire a certain self-possession and ease, and his marvelling at the singular character of the adventurer had begun to weaken, when this new incident threw him back into confusion. It was the extraordinary expression of the stranger's face that alarmed him. Never upon the face of a living being had he seen a pallor so deathlike and chilling. The face was more than pale; it was white. Kimberlin's observing faculty had been sharpened by the absinthe, and, after having detected the stranger in an absent-minded effort two or three times to stroke a beard which had no existence, he reflected that some of the whiteness of the face might be due to the recent removal of a full beard. Besides the pallor, there were deep and sharp lines upon the face, which the electric light brought out very distinctly. With the exception of the steady glance of the eyes and an occasional hard smile, that seemed out of place upon such a face, the expression was that of a stone inartistically cut. The eyes were black, but of heavy expression; the lower lip was purple; the hands were fine, white, and thin, and dark veins bulged out upon them. The stranger pulled down his hat.

'You are lucky,' he said. 'Suppose we try another drink. There is nothing like absinthe to sharpen one's wits, and I see that you and I are going to have a delightful game.'

After the drink the game proceeded. Kimberlin won from the very first, rarely losing a game. He became

greatly excited. His eyes shone; colour came to his cheeks. The stranger, having exhausted the roll of bills which he first produced, drew forth another, much larger and of higher denominations. There were several thousand dollars in the roll. At Kimberlin's right were his winnings—something like two hundred dollars. The stakes were raised, and the game went rapidly on. Another drink was taken. Then fortune turned the stranger's way, and he won easily. It went back to Kimberlin, for he was now playing with all the judgment and skill he could command. Once only did it occur to him to wonder what he should do with the money if he should quit winner; but a sense of honour decided him that it would belong to the stranger.

By this time the absinthe had so sharpened Kimberlin's faculties that, the temporary satisfaction which it had brought to his hunger having passed, his physical suffering returned with increased aggressiveness. Could he not order a supper with his earnings? No; that was out of the question, and the stranger said nothing about eating. Kimberlin continued to play, while the manifestations of hunger took the form of sharp pains, which darted through him viciously, causing him to writhe and grind his teeth. The stranger paid no attention, for he was now wholly absorbed in the game. He seemed puzzled and disconcerted. He played with great care, studying each throw minutely. No conversation passed between them now. They drank occasionally, the dice continued to rattle, the money kept piling up at Kimberlin's hand.

The pale man began to behave strangely. At times he would start and throw back his head, as though he were listening. For a moment his eyes would sharpen and flash, and then sink into heaviness again. More than once Kimberlin, who had now begun to suspect that his antagonist was some kind of monster, saw a frightfully ghastly expression sweep over his face, and his features would become fixed for a very short time in a peculiar

grimace. It was noticeable, however, that he was steadily sinking deeper and deeper into a condition of apathy. Occasionally he would raise his eyes to Kimberlin's face after the young man had made an astonishingly lucky throw, and keep them fixed there with a steadiness that made the young man quail.

The stranger produced another roll of bills when the second was gone, and this had a value many times as great as the others together. The stakes were raised to a thousand dollars a game, and still Kimberlin won. At last the time came when the stranger braced himself for a final effort. With speech somewhat thick, but very deliberate and quiet, he said:

'You have won seventy-four thousand dollars, which is exactly the amount I have remaining. We have been playing for several hours. I am tired, and I suppose you are. Let us finish the game. Each will now stake his all and throw a final game for it.'

Without hesitation, Kimberlin agreed. The bills made a considerable pile on the table. Kimberlin threw, and the box held but one combination that could possibly beat him; this combination might be thrown once in ten thousand times. The starving man's heart beat violently as the stranger picked up the box with exasperating deliberation. It was a long time before he threw. He made his combinations and ended by defeating his opponent. He sat looking at the dice a long time, and then he slowly leaned back in his chair, settled himself comfortably, raised his eyes to Kimberlin's, and fixed that unearthly stare upon him. He said not a word; his face contained not a trace of emotion or intelligence. He simply looked. One cannot keep one's eyes open very long without winking, but the stranger did. He sat so motionless that Kimberlin began to be tortured.

'I will go now,' he said to the stranger—said that when he had not a cent and was starving.

The stranger made no reply, but did not relax his gaze;

and under the gaze the young man shrank back in his own chair, terrified. He became aware that two men were cautiously talking in an adjoining booth. As there was now a deathly silence in his own, he listened, and this is what he heard:

'Yes; he was seen to turn into this street about three hours ago.'

'And he had shaved?'

'He must have done so; and to remove a full beard would naturally make a great change in a man.'

'But it may not have been he.'

'True enough; but his extreme pallor attracted attention. You know that he has been troubled with heart disease lately, and it has affected him seriously.'

'Yes, but his old skill remains. Why, this is the most daring bank robbery we ever had here. A hundred and forty-eight thousand dollars—think of it! How long has it been since he was let out of Joliet?'

'Eight years. In that time he has grown a beard, and lived by dice throwing with men who thought they could detect him if he should swindle them; but that is impossible. No human being can come winner out of a game with him. He is evidently not here; let us look farther.'

Then the two men clinked glasses and passed out.

The dice players—the pale one and the starving one—sat gazing at each other, with a hundred and forty-eight thousand dollars piled up between them. The winner made no move to take in the money; he merely sat and stared at Kimberlin, wholly unmoved by the conversation in the adjoining room. His imperturbability was amazing, his absolute stillness terrifying.

Kimberlin began to shake with an ague. The cold, steady gaze of the stranger sent ice into his marrow. Unable to bear longer this unwavering look, Kimberlin moved to one side, and then he was amazed to discover that the eyes of the pale man, instead of following him, re-

mained fixed upon the spot where he had sat, or, rather, upon the wall behind it. A great dread beset the young man. He feared to make the slightest sound. Voices of men in the bar-room were audible, and the sufferer imagined that he heard others, whispering and tiptoeing in the passage outside his booth. He poured out some absinthe, watching his strange companion all the while, and drank alone and unnoticed. He took a heavy drink, and it had a peculiar effect upon him: he felt his heart bounding with alarming force and rapidity, and breathing was difficult. Still his hunger remained, and that and the absinthe gave him an idea that the gastric acids were destroying him by digesting his stomach. He leaned forward and whispered to the stranger, but was given no attention. One of the man's hands lay upon the table; Kimberlin placed his upon it, and then drew back in terror—the hand was as cold as a stone.

The money must not lie there exposed. Kimberlin arranged it into neat parcels, looking furtively every moment at his immovable companion, and *in mortal fear that he would stir!* Then he sat back and waited. A deadly fascination impelled him to move back into his former position, so as to bring his face directly before the gaze of the stranger. And so the two sat and stared at each other.

Kimberlin felt his breath coming heavier and his heart-beats growing weaker, but these conditions gave him comfort by reducing his anxiety and softening the pangs of hunger. He was growing more and more comfortable and yawned. If he had dared he might have gone to sleep.

Suddenly a fierce light flooded his vision and sent him with a bound to his feet. Had he been struck upon the head or stabbed to the heart? No; he was sound and alive. The pale stranger still sat there staring at nothing and immovable; but Kimberlin was no longer afraid of him. On the contrary, an extraordinary buoyancy of spirit and elasticity of body made him feel reckless and

daring. His former timidity and scruples vanished, and he felt equal to any adventure. Without hesitation he gathered up the money and bestowed it in his several pockets.

'I am a fool to starve,' said he to himself, 'with all this money ready to my hand.'

As cautiously as a thief he unlocked the door, stepped out, reclosed it, and boldly and with head erect stalked out upon the street. Much to his astonishment, he found the city in the bustle of the early evening, yet the sky was clear. It was evident to him that he had not been in the saloon as long as he had supposed. He walked along the street with the utmost unconcern of the dangers that beset him, and laughed softly, but gleefully. What would he not eat now—ah, would he not? Why, he could buy a dozen restaurants! Not only that, but he would hunt the city up and down for hungry men and feed them with the fattest steaks, the juiciest roasts, and the biggest oysters that the town could supply. As for himself, he must eat first; after that he would set up a great establishment for feeding other hungry mortals without charge. Yes, he would eat first; if he pleased, he would eat till he should burst. In what single place could he find sufficient to satisfy his hunger? Could he live sufficiently long to have an ox killed and roasted whole for his supper? Besides an ox he would order two dozen broiled chickens, fifty dozen oysters, a dozen crabs, ten dozen eggs, ten hams, eight young pigs, twenty wild ducks, fifteen fish of four different kinds, eight salads, four dozen bottles each of claret, burgundy, and champagne; for pastry, eight plum puddings, and for dessert, bushels of nuts, ices, and confections. It would require time to prepare such a meal, and if he could only live until it could be made ready it would be infinitely better than to spoil his appetite with a dozen or two meals of ordinary size. He thought he could live that long, for he felt amazingly strong and bright. Never in his life before had he walked with

so great ease and lightness; his feet hardly touched the ground—he ran and leaped. It did him good to tantalize his hunger, for that would make his relish of the feast all the keener. Oh, but how they would stare when he would give his order, and how comically they would hang back, and how amazed they would be when he would throw a few thousands of dollars on the counter and tell them to take their money out of it and keep the change! Really, it was worthwhile to be so hungry as that, for then eating became an unspeakable luxury. And one must not be in too great a hurry to eat when one is so hungry—that is beastly. How much of the joy of living do rich people miss from eating before they are hungry—before they have gone three days and nights without food! And how manly it is, and how great self-control it shows, to dally with starvation when one has a dazzling fortune in one's pocket and every restaurant has an open door! To be hungry without money—that is despair; to be starving with a bursting pocket—that is sublime! Surely the only true heaven is that in which one famishes in the presence of abundant food, which he might have for the taking, and then a gorged stomach and a long sleep!

The starving wretch, speculating thus, still kept from food. He felt himself growing in stature, and the people whom he met became pygmies. The streets widened, the stars became suns and dimmed the electric lights, and the most intoxicating odours and the sweetest music filled the air. Shouting, laughing, and singing, Kimberlin joined in a great chorus that swept over the city, and then—

The two detectives who had traced the famous bank robber to the saloon in Mason Street, where Kimberlin had encountered the stranger of the pallid face, left the saloon; but, unable to pursue the trail farther, had finally returned. They found the door of booth No. 7 locked. After rapping and calling and receiving no answer, they burst open the door, and there they saw two men—one

of middle age and the other very young—sitting perfectly still, and in the strangest manner imaginable staring at each other across the table. Between them was a great pile of money, arranged neatly in parcels. Near at hand was an empty absinthe bottle, a water pitcher, glasses, and a dicebox, with the dice lying before the elder man as he had thrown them last. One of the detectives covered the elder man with a revolver and commanded:

‘Throw up your hands!’

But the dice thrower paid no attention. The detectives exchanged startled glances. They looked closer into the face of the two men, and then they discovered that both were dead.

WHERE THE WOODBINE TWINETH

Davis Grubb

It was not that Nell hadn't done everything she could. Many's the windy, winter afternoon she had spent reading to the child from *Pilgrim's Progress* and Hadley's *Comportment for Young Ladies* and from the gilded, flowery leaves of *A Spring Garland of Noble Thoughts*. And she had countless times reminded the little girl that we must all strive to make ourselves useful in this Life and that five years old wasn't too young to begin to learn. Though none of it had helped. And there were times when Nell actually regretted ever taking in the curious, gold-haired child that tragic winter when Nell's brother Amos and his foolish wife had been killed. Eva stubbornly spent her days dreaming under the puzzle-tree or sitting on the stone steps of the ice-house making up tunes or squatting on the little square carpet stool in the dark parlour whispering softly to herself.

Eva! cried Nell one day, surprising her there. Who are you talking to?

To my friends, said Eva quietly, Mister Peppercorn and Sam and—.

Eva! cried Nell. I will not have this nonsense any longer! You know perfectly well there's no one in this parlour but you!

They live under the davenport, explained Eva patiently. And behind the Pianola. They're very small so it's easy.

Eva! Hush that talk this instant! cried Nell.

You never believe me, sighed the child, when I tell you things are real.

They aren't real! said Nell. And I forbid you to make up such tales any longer! When I was a little girl

I never had time for such mischievous nonsense. I was far too busy doing the bidding of my fine God-fearing parents and learning to be useful in this world!

Dusk was settling like a golden smoke over the willows down by the river shore when Nell finished pruning her roses that afternoon. And she was stripping off her white linen garden gloves on her way to the kitchen to see if Suse and Jessie had finished their Friday baking. Then she heard Eva speaking again, far off in the dark parlour, the voice quiet at first and then rising curiously, edged with terror.

Eva! cried Nell, hurrying down the hall, determined to put an end to the foolishness once and for all. Eva! Come out of that parlour this very instant!

Eva appeared in the doorway, her round face streaming and broken with grief, her fat, dimpled fist pressed to her mouth in grief.

You did it! the child shrieked. *You did it!*

Nell stood frozen, wondering how she could meet this.

They *heard* you! Eva cried, stamping her fat shoe on the bare, thin carpet. They heard you say you didn't want them to stay here! And now they've all gone away! *All* of them—Mister Peppercorn and Mingo and Sam and Popo!

Nell grabbed the child by the shoulders and began shaking her, not hard but with a mute, hysterical compulsion.

Hush up! cried Nell, thickly. Hush, Eva! Stop it this very instant!

You did it! wailed the golden child, her head lolling back in a passion of grief and bereavement. *My friends!* You made them go away!

All that evening Nell sat alone in her bedroom trembling with curious satisfaction. For punishment Eva had been sent to her room without supper and Nell sat listening now to the even, steady sobs far off down the hall. It was dark and on the river shore a night bird tried its note cautiously against the silence. Down in the pantry, the

dishes done, Suse and Jessie, dark as night itself, drank coffee by the great stove and mumbled over stories of the old times before the War. Nell fetched her smelling salts and sniffed the frosted stopper of the flowered bottle till the trembling stopped.

Then, before the summer seemed half begun, it was late August. And one fine, sharp morning, blue with the smoke of burning leaves, the steamboat *Samantha Collins* docked at Cresap's Landing. Eva sat, as she had been sitting most of that summer, alone on the cool, worn steps of the ice-house, staring moodily at the daisies bobbing gently under the burden of droning, golden bees.

Eva! Nell called cheerfully from the kitchen window. Someone's coming today!

Eva sighed and said nothing, glowering mournfully at the puzzle-tree and remembering the wonderful stories that Mingo used to tell.

Grandfather's boat landed this morning, Eva! cried Nell. He's been all the way to New Orleans and I wouldn't be at all surprised if he brought his little girl a present!

Eva smelled suddenly the wave of honeysuckle that wafted sweet and evanescent from the tangled blooms on the stone wall and sighed, recalling the high, gay lilt to the voice of Mister Peppercorn when he used to sing her his enchanting songs.

Eva! called Nell again. Did you hear what Aunt Nell said? Your grandpa's coming home this afternoon!

Yes'm, said Eva lightly, hugging her fat knees and tucking her plain little skirt primly under her bottom.

And supper that night had been quite pleasant. Jessie made raspberry cobblers for the Captain and fetched in a prize ham from the meat-house, frosted and feathery with mould, and Suse had baked fresh that forenoon till the ripe, yeasty smell of hot bread seemed everywhere in the world. Nobody said a word while the Captain told of his trip to New Orleans and Eva listened to his stern

old voice and remembered Nell's warnings never to interrupt when he was speaking and only to speak herself when spoken to. When supper was over the Captain sat back and sucked the coffee briskly from his white moustache. Then rising without a word he went to the chair by the crystal umbrella stand in the hallway and fetched back a long box wrapped in brown paper.

Eva's eyes rose slowly and shone over the rim of her cup.

I reckon this might be something to please a little girl, said the old man gruffly, thrusting the box into Eva's hands.

For me? whispered Eva.

Well now! grunted the Captain. I didn't fetch this all the way up the river from N'Orleans for any other girl in Cresap's Landing!

And presently string snapped and paper rustled expectantly and the cardboard box lay open at last and Eva stared at the creature which lay within, her eyes shining and wide with sheerest disbelief.

Numa! she whispered.

What did you say, Eva? said Nell. Don't mumble your words!

It's Numa! cried the child, searching both their faces for the wonder that was hers. They told me she'd be coming but I didn't know Grandpa was going to bring her! Mister Peppercorn said—.

Eva! whispered Nell.

Eva looked gravely at her grandfather, hoping not to seem too much of a tattle-tale, hoping that he would not deal too harshly with Nell for the fearful thing she had done that summer day.

Aunt Nell made them all go away, she began.

Nell leaned across the table clutching her linen napkin tight in her white knuckles.

Father! she whispered. Please don't discuss it with her! She's made up all this nonsense and I've been half

out of my mind all this summer! First it was some foolishness about people who live under the davenport in the parlour—.

Eva sighed and stared at the gas-light winking brightly on her grandfather's watch chain and felt somewhere the start of tears.

It's really true, she said boldly. She never believes me when I tell her things are real. She made them all go away. But one day Mister Peppercorn came back. It was just for a minute. And he told me they were sending me Numa instead!

And then she fell silent and simply sat, heedless of Nell's shrill voice trying to explain. Eva sat staring with love and wonder at the Creole doll with the black, straight tresses and the lovely coffee skin.

Whatever the summer had been, the autumn, at least, had seemed the most wonderful season of Eva's life. In the fading afternoons of that dying Indian Summer she would sit by the hour, not brooding now, but holding the dark doll in her arms and weaving a shimmering spell of fancy all their own. And when September winds stirred, sharp and prescient with new seasons, Eva, clutching her dark new friend would tiptoe down the hallway to the warm, dark parlour and sit by the Pianola to talk some more.

Nell came down early from her afternoon nap one day and heard Eva's excited voice far off in the quiet house. She paused with her hand on the newel post, listening, half-wondering what the other sound might be, half-thinking it was the wind nudging itself wearily against the old white house. Then she peered in the parlour door.

Eva! said Nell. What are you doing?

It was so dark that Nell could not be certain of what she saw.

She went quickly to the window and threw up the shade.

Eva sat on the square carpet stool by the Pianola,

her blue eyes blinking innocently at Nell and the dark doll staring vacuously up from the cardboard box beside her.

Who was here with you? said Nell. I distinctly heard two voices.

Eva sat silent, staring at Nell's stiff high shoes. Then her great eyes slowly rose.

You never believe me, the child whispered, when I tell you things are real.

Old Suse, at least, understood things perfectly.

How's the scampy baby doll grandpappy brought you, lamb? the old Negro woman said that afternoon as she perched on the high stool by the pump, paring apples for a pie. Eva squatted comfortably on the floor with Numa and watched the red and white rind curl neatly from Suse's quick, dark fingers.

Life is hard! Eva sighed philosophically. Yes oh yes! Life is hard! That's what Numa says!

Such talk for a youngster! Suse grunted, plopping another white quarter of fruit into the pan of spring water. What you studyin' about Life for! And you only five!

Numa tells me, sighed Eva, her great blue eyes far away. Oh yes! She really does! She says if Aunt Nell ever makes her go away she'll take me with her!

Take you! chuckled Suse, brushing a blue-bottle from her arm. Take you where?

Where the woodbine twineth, sighed Eva.

Which place? said Suse, cocking her head.

Where the woodbine twineth, Eva repeated patiently.

I declare! Suse chuckled. I never done heard tell of *that* place!

Eva cupped her chin in her hands and sighed reflectively.

Sometimes, she said presently. We just talk. And sometimes we play.

What y'all play? asked Suse, obligingly.

Doll, said Eva. Oh yes, we play doll. Sometimes Numa gets tired of being doll and I'm the doll and she puts me in the box and plays with me!

She waved her hand casually to show Suse how really simple it all was.

Suse eyed her sideways with twinkling understanding, the laughter struggling behind her lips.

She puts *you* in that little bitty box? said Suse. And *you's* a doll?

Yes oh yes! said Eva. She really does! May I have an apple, Suse?

When she had peeled and rinsed it, Sue handed Eva a whole, firm Northern Spy.

Don't you go and spoil your supper now, lamb! she warned.

Oh! cried Eva. It's not for me. It's for Numa!

And she put the dark doll in the box and stumped off out the back door to the puzzle-tree.

Nell came home from choir practice at five that afternoon and found the house so silent that she wondered for a moment if Suse or Jessie had taken Eva down to the landing to watch the evening Packet pass. The kitchen was empty and silent except for the thumping of a pot on the stove and Nell went out into the yard and stood listening by the rose arbour. Then she heard Eva's voice. And through the falling light she saw them then, beneath the puzzle-tree.

Eva! cried Nell. Who is that with you!

Eva was silent as Nell's eyes strained to piece together the shadow and substance of the dusk. She ran quickly down the lawn to the puzzle-tree. But only Eva was there. Off in the river the evening Packet blew dully for the bend. Nell felt the wind, laced with autumn, stir the silence round her like a web.

Eva! said Nell. I distinctly saw another child with you! Who was it?

Eva sighed and sat cross-legged in the grass with the

long box and the dark doll beside her.

You never believe me—, she began softly, staring guiltily at the apple core in the grass.

Eva! cried Nell, brushing a firefly roughly from her arm so that it left a smear of dying gold. I'm going to have an end to this nonsense right now!

And she picked up the doll in the cardboard box and started towards the house. Eva screamed in terror.

Numa! she wailed.

You may cry all you please, Eva! said Nell. But you may not have your doll until you come to me and admit that you don't really believe all this nonsense about fairies and imaginary people!

Numa! screamed Eva, jumping up and down in the grass and beating her fists against her bare, grass-stained knees, Numa!

I'm putting this box on top of the Pianola, Eva, said Nell. And I'll fetch it down again when you confess to me that there was another child playing with you this afternoon. I cannot countenance falsehoods!

Numa said, screamed Eva, that if you made her go away—!

I don't care to hear another word! said Nell, walking ahead of the wailing child up the dark lawn towards the house.

But the words sprang forth like Eva's very tears.—She'd take me away with her! she screamed.

Not another word! said Nell. Stop your crying and go up to your room and get undressed for bed!

And she went into the parlour and placed the doll box on top of the Pianola next to the music rolls.

A week later the thing ended. And years after that autumn night Nell, mad and simpering, would tell the tale again and stare at the pitying, doubting faces in the room around her and she would whimper to them in a parody of the childish voice of Eva herself: You never believe me when I tell you things are real!

It was a pleasant September evening and Nell had been to a missionary meeting with Nan Snyder that afternoon and she had left Nan at her steps and was hurrying up the tanbark walk by the ice-house when she heard the prattling laughter of Eva far back in the misty shadows of the lawn. Nell ran swiftly into the house to the parlour—to the Pianola. The doll box was not there. She hurried to the kitchen door and peered out through the netting into the dusky river evening. She did not call to Eva then but went out and stripped a willow switch from the little tree by the stone wall and tip-toed softly down the lawn. A light wind blew from the river meadows, heavy and sweet with wetness, like the breath of cattle. They were laughing and joking together as Nell crept soundlessly upon them, speaking low as children do, with wild, delicious intimacy, and then bubbling high with laughter that cannot be contained. Nell approached silently, feeling the dew soak through to her ankles, clutching the switch tightly in her hand. She stopped and listened for a moment, for suddenly there was but one voice now, a low and wonderfully lyric sound that was not the voice of Eva. Then Nell stared wildly down through the misshapen leaves of the puzzle-tree and saw the dark child sitting with the doll box in its lap.

So! cried Nell, stepping suddenly through the canopy of leaves. You're the darkie child who's been sneaking up here to play with Eva!

The child put the box down and jumped to its feet with a low cry of fear as Nell sprang forward, the willow switch flailing furiously about the dark ankles.

Now scat! cried Nell. Get on home where you belong and don't ever come back!

For an instant the dark child stared in horror first at Nell and then at the doll box, its sorrowing, somnolent eyes brimming with wild words and a grief for which it had no tongue, its lips trembling as if there were something Nell should know that she might never learn again

after that autumn night was gone.

Go on, I say! Nell shouted, furious.

The switch flickered about the dark arms and legs faster than ever. And suddenly with a cry of anguish the dark child turned and fled through the tall grass toward the meadow and the willows on the river shore. Nell stood trembling for a moment, letting the rage ebb slowly from her body.

Eva! she called out presently. Eva!

There was no sound but the dry steady racket of the frogs by the landing.

Eva! screamed Nell. Come to me this instant!

She picked up the doll box and marched angrily up towards the lights in the kitchen.

Eva! cried Nell. You're going to get a good switching for this!

A night bird in the willow tree by the stone wall cried once and started up into the still, affrighted dark. Nell did not call again for, suddenly, like the mood of the autumn night, the very sound of her voice had begun to frighten her. And when she was in the kitchen Nell screamed so loudly that Suse and Jessie, long asleep in their shack down below the ice-house, woke wide and stared wondering into the dark. Nell stared for a long moment after she had screamed, not believing, really, for it was at once so perfect and yet so unreal. Trembling violently Nell ran back out onto the lawn.

Come back! screamed Nell hoarsely into the tangled far off shadows by the river. Come back! Oh please! Please come back!

But the dark child was gone forever. And Nell, creeping back at last to the kitchen, whimpering and slack-mouthed, looked again at the lovely little dreadful creature in the doll box: the gold-haired, plaster Eva with the eyes too blue to be real.

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